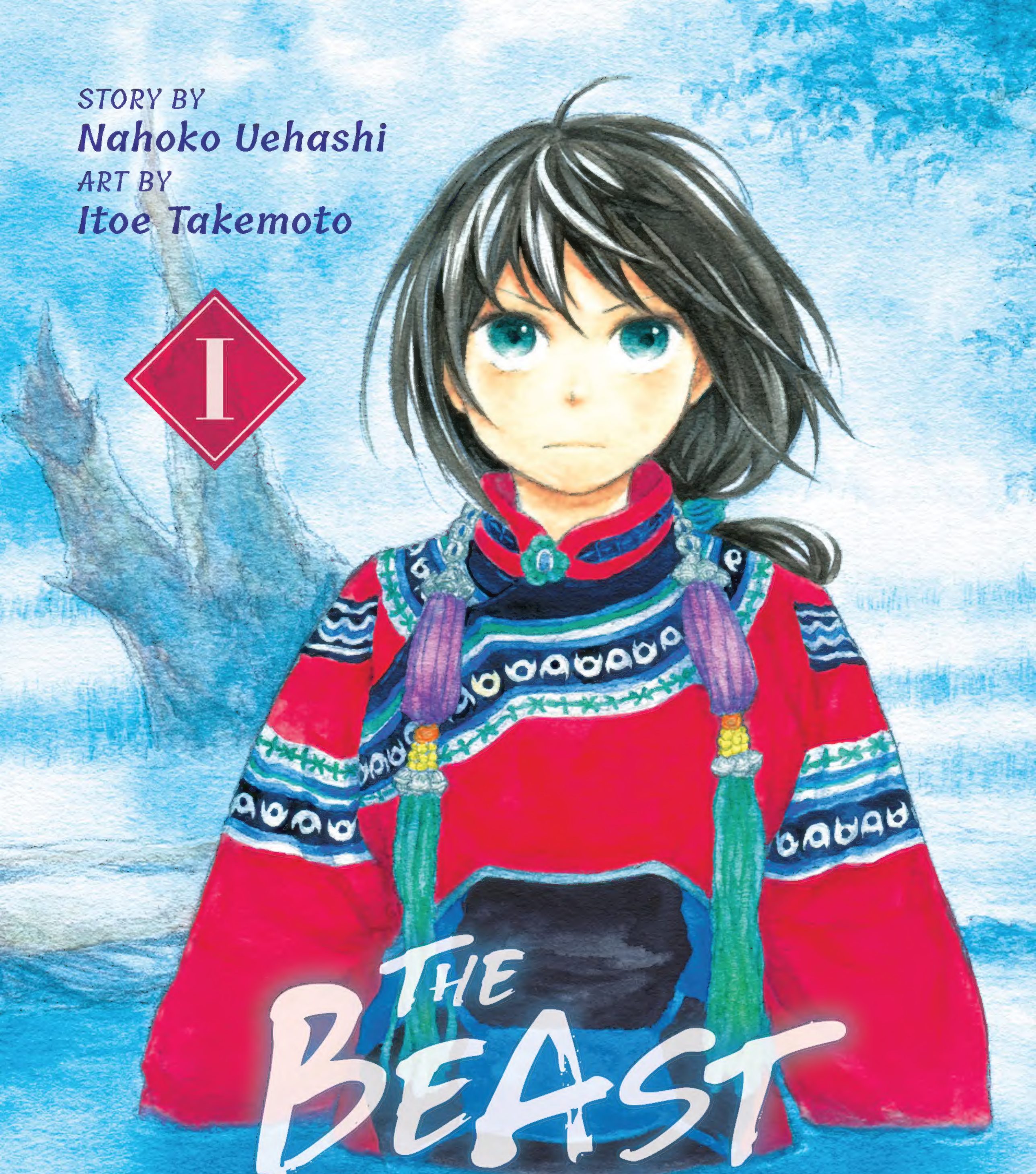
STORY BY
Nahoko Uehashi
ART BY
Itoe Takemoto

I



THE BEAST PLAYER

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I

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The Beast Player

I

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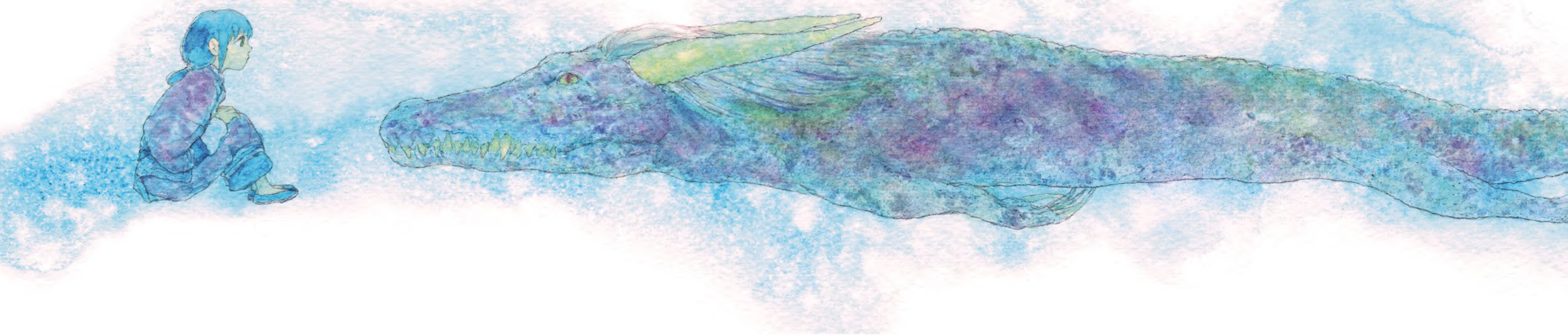
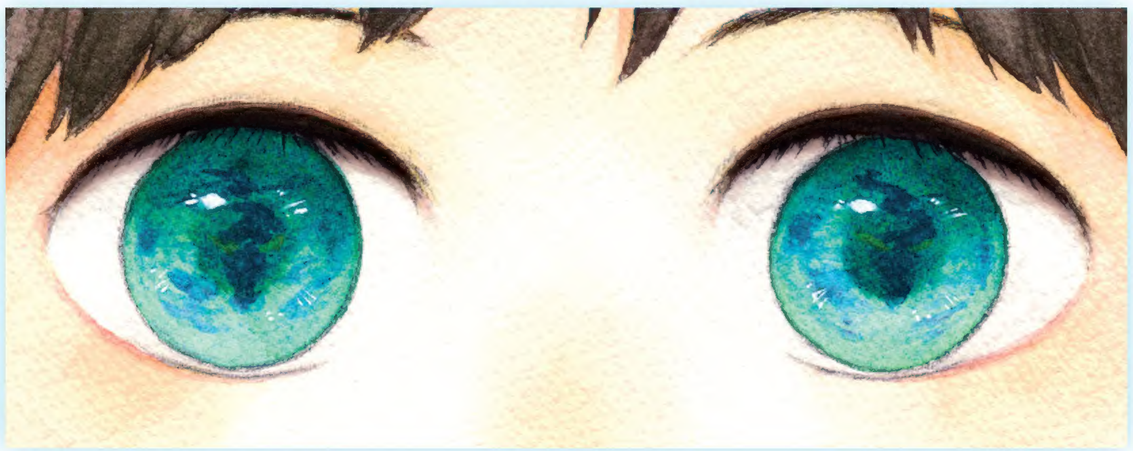
The English translation of the original novel, *The Beast Player,* was used as a reference for the translation of this manga adaptation. This was done in order to maintain consistency across mediums and to respect the original translations by Cathy Hirano.





Prologue 1

The Toda's Lament

YES,
YES...

MOTHEEER!
HURRY,
LET'S GO!!

YEAH!!

ARE YOU
GOING TO
SEE THE
TODA AGAIN?

ELIN,

OH?

Note: *Toda* (闘蛇) is written with the characters for "battle" and "snake."

YOU
TAKE CARE,
NOW!

Hurry, hurry!

SHE'S A
FUNNY ONE,
ISN'T SHE?

GOODNESS,
LOOK HOW
HAPPY THAT
GIRL IS.

OH!

THEY'RE TRAINING TODAY, HUH?

THE *KIBA!*

Note: *Kiba* (牙) is written with the character for "fang."

STAY THERE, ELIN!

FWSSSHHH

?!

MOTHER ?!

LEAP

?!

WH...

WHAT...?

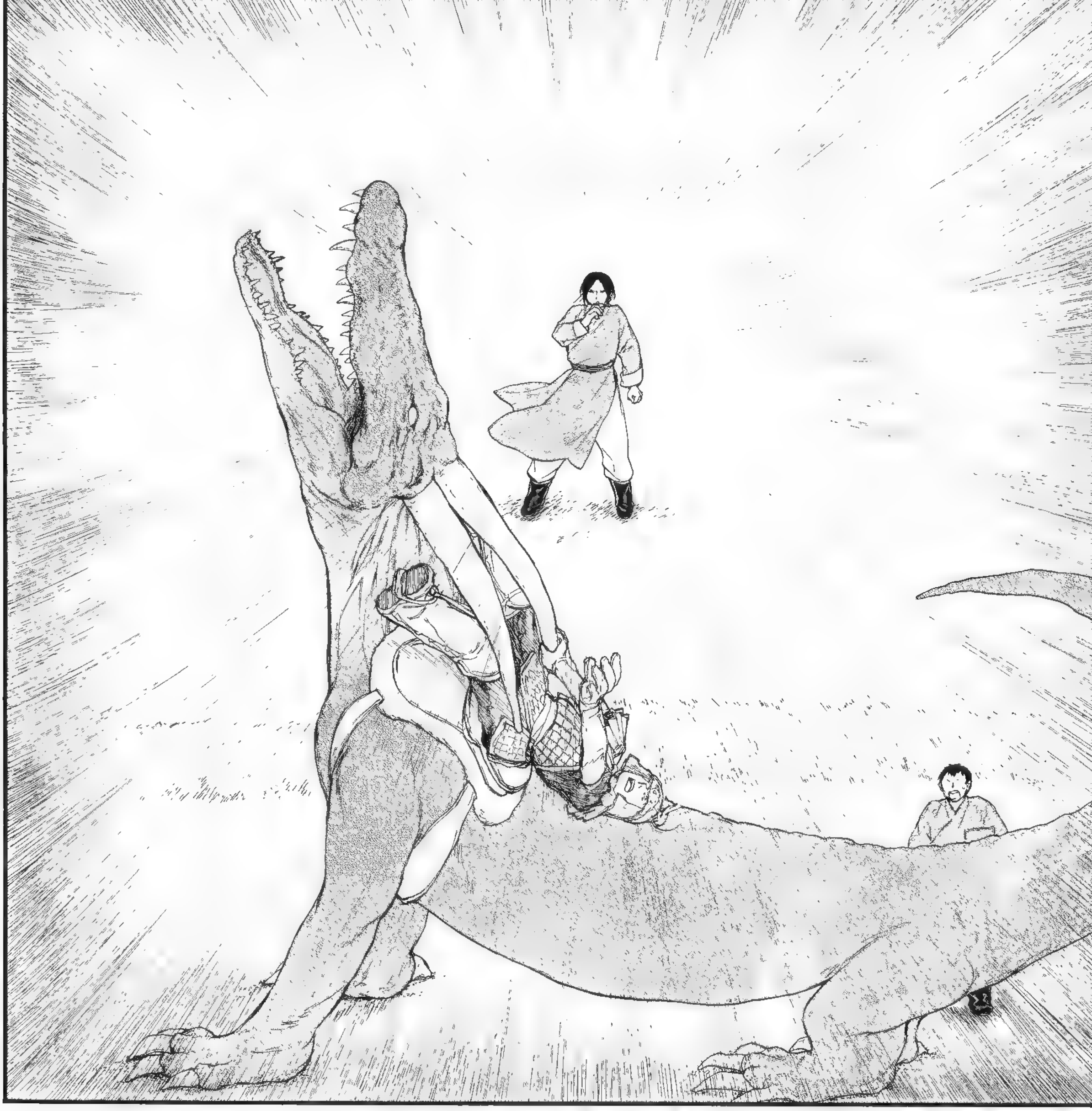
GRAAH

!!

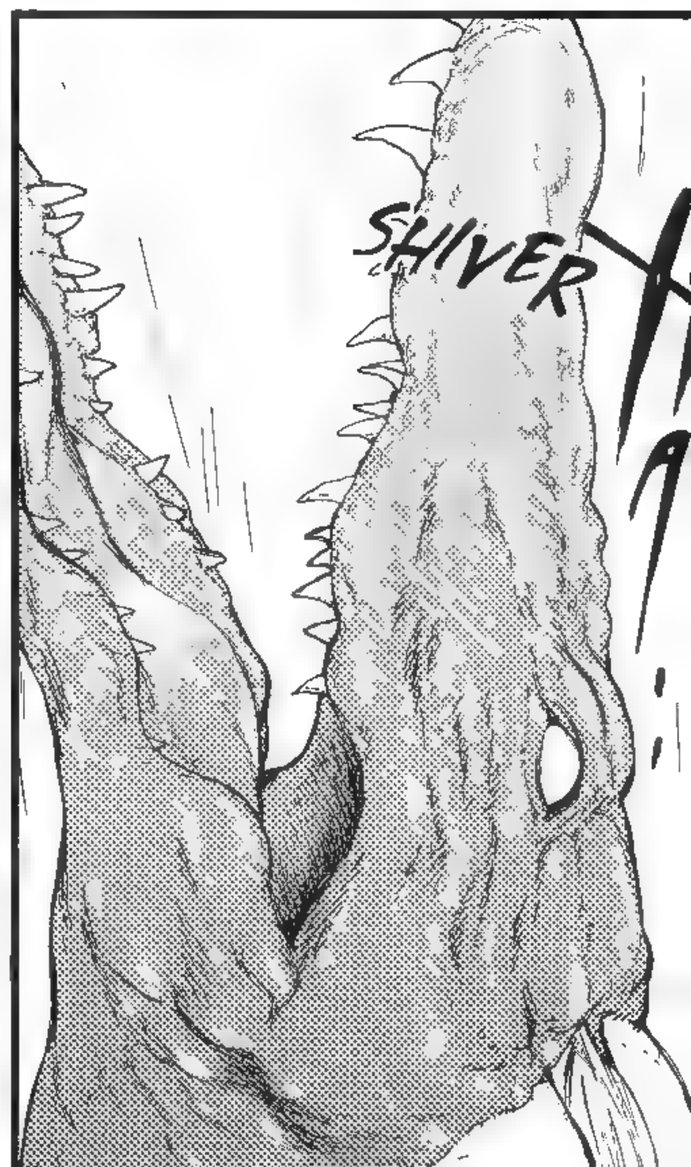
WHOA!

GRRR...

?!



DWOOOOM


SHIVER

HEY!

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?!

ナ"ト"ラ"!!
CLAMOR

...!!

HUP

I'M SO SORRY!

I...

THEY'LL HAVE YOUR HEAD IF ANYTHING HAPPENS TO THE KIBA!

YOU IDIOT!

ARE YOU HURT?

I'M FINE.

NO...

...

YES, MA'AM!

ALLOW IT TO REST FOR TODAY.

THIS POOR CHILD...

TMP
TMP
TMP
TMP
MOTHER!
IS THE KIBA OKAY?
WHAT HAPPENED?
IT'LL BE FINE.

I'M GLAD!

OH...

I ASKED THEM TO LET IT REST FOR THE DAY.

HERE, THE STEWARDS RAISE THE TODA, THE LARGE WAR SERPENTS THAT SPEARHEAD THE KINGDOM'S FORCES ON THE BATTLEFIELD.

THIS IS A VILLAGE OF TODA STEWARDS WITHIN THE DOMAIN OF THE ALUHAN, THE GRAND DUKE, WHO IS TASKED WITH THE PROTECTION OF THE DIVINE KINGDOM OF LYOZA.

SPLSH

FLINCH

ELIN!

YOU JUST SAW IT FOR YOURSELF, DIDN'T YOU?

THE TODA ARE FEARSOME BEASTS.

I'M SORRY, MOTHER...

...

IF YOU APPROACH THEM CARELESSLY, THEY'LL SENSE IT...

AND SWALLOW YOU IN ONE BITE.

WE USE THIS SILENT WHISTLE TO NUMB THEIR SENSES.

...BUT WHEN WE TODA STEWARDS, AND THE WARRIORS, TOUCH THEM,

YOU MAY FEEL COMFORTABLE AROUND THEM BECAUSE YOU'VE SEEN THEM SO OFTEN...

THE TODA CAN NEVER BE TAMED...

THEY AREN'T MEANT TO BE TAMED.

...WHEN WILL I BE ALLOWED TO TOUCH THEM?

...

THEN...

SO...JUST LET ME PET HER A BIT... OKAY?

I'LL ALWAYS FOLLOW YOUR INSTRUCTIONS!!

I'LL BE GOOD!

ELIN!

...

...SHINING IN ALL THOSE PRETTY COLORS...

I CAN'T STOP THINKING ABOUT IT.

I WANT TO KNOW HOW IT FEELS TO TOUCH THEIR SPARKLY SCALES...

...

DON'T MAKE ME REPEAT MYSELF, ELIN...

...YOU WON'T LET ME?

...

MOTHER?

...

THEN... WE CAN TALK ABOUT IT.

...YOU STILL WANT TO TOUCH THEM...

AND BECOME A YOUNG WOMAN OF AROUND 15...

...IF, WHEN YOU GROW UP...

...

...

YOU GO ON HOME, NOW.

...

...

ПО ТЕР

ｱﾄ
ﾌﾟﾛ
SLOSH

ｱﾄ
ﾌﾟﾛ
SLOSH

ｶﾞｺﾝ
KA-
KLUNK

ｱﾄﾌﾟﾛ
SLSH...

TOMP

ｱﾄ
ﾌﾟﾛ
GLRG

GLRG
ｱﾄ
ﾌﾟﾛ

SPLASH
ﾋﾟﾁｬ

FLINK
MOTHER...
WAS THAT LIGHTNING?

I WONDER IF THE TODA GO TO SLEEP AT NIGHT, TOO...?

A SWEET SCENT... IT SMELLS LIKE THE TODA...

DOZE

IT'S FAR OFF OVER THE MOUNTAINS. GO BACK TO SLEEP.

DON'T WORRY.

NOD

ZZZZ

...!

WHAT IS THAT?!

WHAT IS THAT SOUND?!

MOTHER!!

FWEEEEEE

FIN EEEEEE

BUT, MOTHER...

TOMP

YOU STAY HERE, UNDERSTOOD?

IT'S COMING FROM ALL OVER.

IT ALMOST SOUNDS LIKE A SCREAM...

ISN'T THAT THE EASTERN BLUFF...?

THE TODA STEWARDS ...?

THE SOUND SEEMS TO BE COMING FROM THE TODA CHAMBERS...
HAAH
HAAH

GASP

THE KIBA!

!!

...

...?

GRAND-FATHER ...?

!

MO—

...

GRAB

...ARE THEY DEAD?

ALL FIVE OF THEM...

...THEY ALL DIED?

CHIEF!

THEY WERE WHISTLING IN MOURNING UNTIL A MOMENT AGO, AND ARE STILL QUITE AGITATED...

...BUT OKAY.

IT'S JUST THE KIBA. THE TRUNK AND TAIL TODA ARE ALL OKAY.

WHAT ABOUT THE OTHER TODA?

...

GRIP

?!!

MURMUR

さわ...

THE KIBA IN THE NEXT CHAMBER OVER...THEY'RE ALL DEAD, TOO!

IF THEY'RE AGITATED AND THEY SWIM ABOUT TOO MUCH, THEY CAN SCRAPE AND INJURE THEMSELVES ON THE ROCKS!

WE WILL *NOT* LOSE ANOTHER TODA!

RETURN TO THE CHAMBERS UNDER YOUR CARE AT ONCE!

TO DIE?

WHAT CAUSED THEM...

THUD

THUD

THUD

NO.

THE GILLS ARE CLEAN. THE WASHU MUST HAVE GATHERED AFTER ITS DEATH.

WAS IT INFESTED WITH *WASHU*? DID IT SUFFOCATE FROM THE INSECTS?

I...

...DON'T KNOW YET.

...

DID YOU NOT NOTICE ANYTHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY DURING YOUR MIDNIGHT ROUNDS?

WHAT ABOUT THE *TOKUJISUI* HERBAL WATER? YOU'VE BEEN ADMINISTERING IT REGULARLY?

Note: *Tokujisui* (特滋水), or "special nourishment water," is a herbal mixture given only to the Kiba.

ONCE THE INSPECTOR COMES, YOU WILL BE QUESTIONED AND PUNISHED FOR THIS...

TO ALLOW *ALL* OF THE KIBA TO PERISH...

IS AN ATROCIOUS CRIME.

YES...I AM PREPARED FOR IT.

THEY WILL WANT TO KNOW WHY I WOULD HAVE ALLOWED YOU, AN *AHLYO*, TO CARE FOR THE KIBA, THE GRAND DUKE'S PRIZED TREASURES!!

I WILL BE THOROUGHLY INTERROGATED BY THE INSPECTOR JUST THE SAME!

AS THE CHIEF OF THE TODA STEWARDS... AS YOUR FATHER-IN-LAW...

"PREPARED"?! SOHYON!

I HAVE TO BE EQUALLY PREPARED FOR YOUR BLUNDER!

THAT'S WHY I GRANTED MY SON'S WISH AGAINST EVERYONE ELSE'S OBJECTIONS!

YOUR SKILLS AS A BEAST DOCTOR WERE INDEED OUT-STANDING.

NAY.

THAT WASN'T ALL...

IF NOT FOR THE CHILD YOU BORE WITH HIM!

IF NOT FOR ASSON'S DYING WISH...

BUT...

TO HAVE THINGS TURN OUT THIS WAY...!!

WHEEE

WHEEE

SLUMP

MOTH-
ER...

MOTHER.

IT WILL
BE OKAY,
ELIN.

...IT'S ALL RIGHT.

HE SAID IT'S A TERRIBLE CRIME...

BUT...

THERE WAS A TIME WHEN ALL OF THE KIBA FELL DEAD, TOO, JUST LIKE THIS.

...BUT BACK IN HIS FATHER'S TIME...

YOUR GRANDFATHER MAY HAVE SAID THAT...

EVERYONE KNOWS THIS.

THEY ARE FAR MORE SUSCEPTIBLE TO ILLNESS.

BUT...

ARE MUCH BIGGER AND STRONGER THAN THE OTHER TODA.

THE KIBA...

...

...

MOTHER,

DO THE TODA SMELL DIFFERENTLY WHEN THEY DIE?

OR...

DOES THIS TODA SMELL DIFFERENT BECAUSE IT WAS SICK?

...?

AND I THOUGHT THAT MIGHT BE WHY THESE WEIRD FLYING INSECTS ARE ALL OVER ITS BODY...

HUH?

I MEAN...

THIS TODA SMELLS DIFFERENT.

WHAT...

MADE YOU THINK THAT?

...BUT I'VE NEVER SEEN THESE BUGS IN THE CHAMBERS BEFORE.

YOU ALWAYS SEE WASHU IN THE WATER...

AND...?

SO I THOUGHT THESE STRANGE BUGS MIGHT HAVE BEEN DRAWN HERE BECAUSE THE TODA'S SCENT HAD CHANGED, TOO...

YOU ONCE TAUGHT ME HOW...

DIFFERENT FLOWERS HAVE DIFFERENT FRAGRANCES, WHICH IS WHY THEY EACH ATTRACT DIFFERENT INSECTS.

...

YOU...

YOU MUST NEVER...

TELL ANYONE ABOUT THOSE THOUGHTS.

ELIN.

IT COULD JUST DRAW SUSPICION FROM THE WRONG KIND OF PEOPLE...

...

WHY NOT?

...I DON'T CARE ABOUT BEING SCOLDED...

BUT...

...

THEN YOU WILL BE SCOLDED, DEAR.

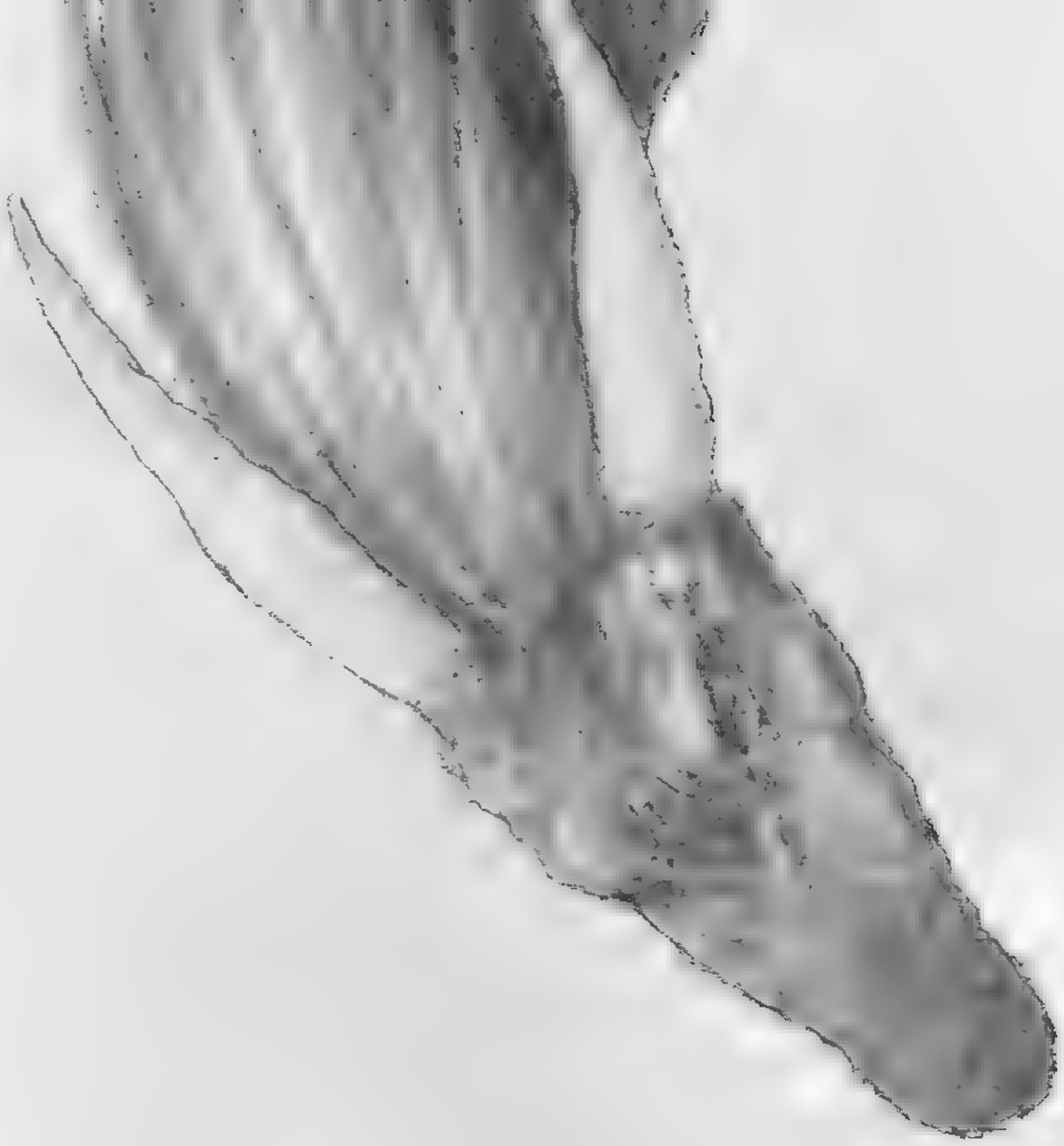
AND...IF PEOPLE THINK YOU'RE MAKING UP STORIES JUST TO SAVE ME...

HFF

SPLSH

THANK YOU.

THE BEAST PLAYER



...is an atrocious crime.

To allow all of the Kiba to perish...

TWITCH

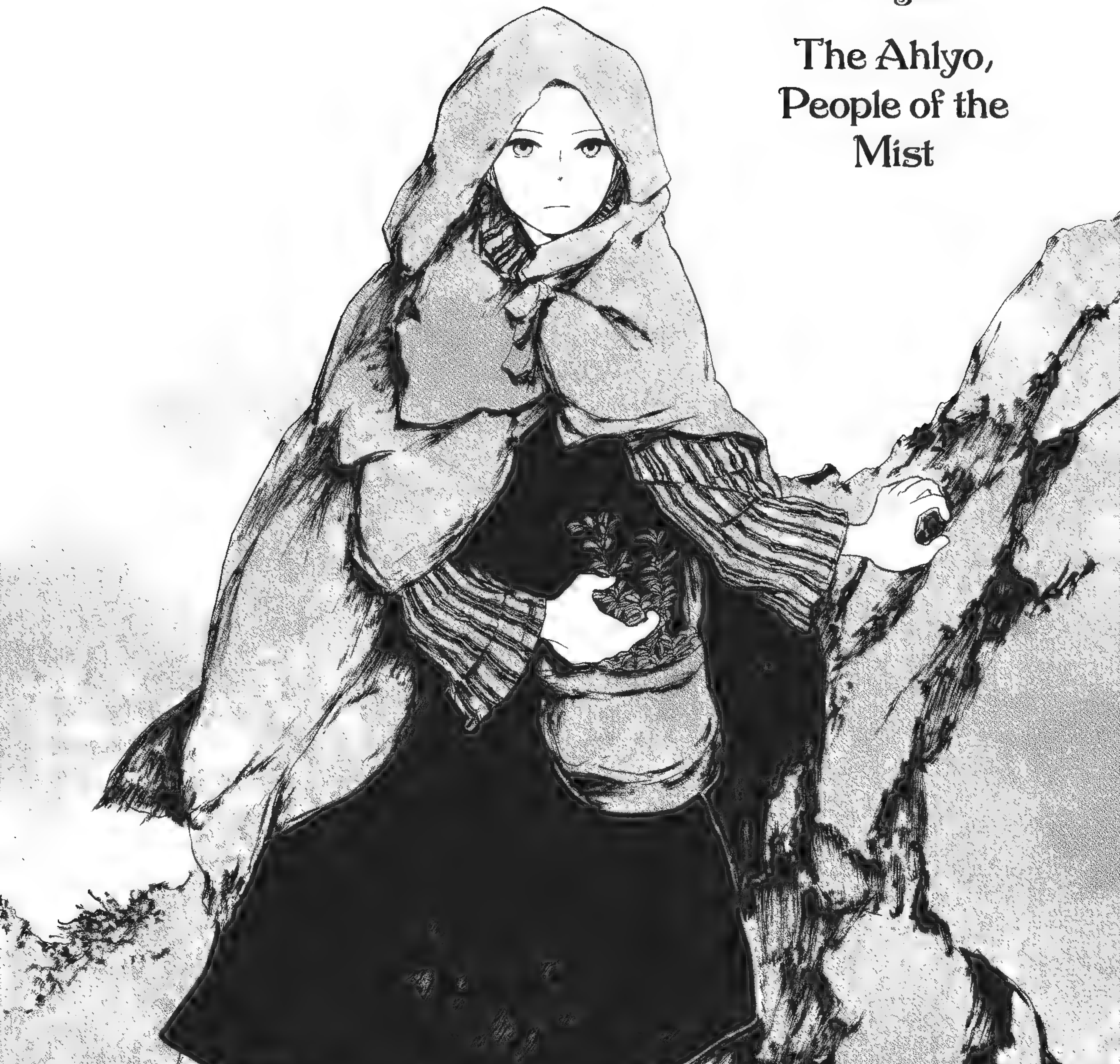
KRSH

WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN NOW...?

...MOTHER...

Prologue 2

The Ahlyo, People of the Mist



FP
TO
PLSH

I REMEMBER MY FRIEND, SAJU, MENTIONING THEM BEFORE...

?

...

THE AHLYO... "PEOPLE OF THE MIST"...

They will want to know why I would have allowed you, an Ahlyo, to care for the Kiba...

...

Do all Ahlyo have green eyes?

Say...

you have green eyes, just like your mother.

Elin,

Elin, were you bitten by a devil?

They call people like that *Akun Meh Chai*— "devil-bitten children."

Um, do you have magic powers, too?

I heard it's normally impossible for a child to be born between an Ahlyo and a villager.

AND THE COLD TREATMENT WE'D RECEIVE FROM MY GRANDPARENTS, TOTALLY UNLIKE HOW SAJU'S TREATED HER...AND...

ALWAYS BATHING LAST AT THE COMMUNAL BATHHOUSE, TOO, AFTER EVERYONE ELSE WAS DONE...

LET'S GO.

ELIN.

THAT HAS ALWAYS...

...BOTHERED ME...

...

WHISPER

WHISPER

...CLEARLY LOOKS DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHER VILLAGERS.

MOTHER...

AM I AN AKUN MEH CHAI?

IS THAT BECAUSE MOTHER IS AN AHLYO?

IS THAT WHY MOTHER IS BEING ACCUSED OF A CRIME?

WHEN WAS IT THAT I FIRST REALIZED...

...THAT MOTHER IS TALLER THAN ANYONE ELSE IN THE VILLAGE?

THAT THE SHAPE OF HER FACE AND COLOR OF HER EYES AREN'T THE SAME AS THE OTHERS?

YOU MUST BE TIRED.

...

SQUEEZE

キュッ

LET'S FILL OUR TUMMIES...

SO WE CAN BE STRONG FOR TOMORROW!

YUP!

HUH?

TONIGHT, FOR SUPPER...

WHY DON'T WE HAVE WILD BOAR?

EVEN THOUGH IT'S NOT A SPECIAL DAY?

WE GET TO HAVE WILD BOAR TONIGHT?

REALLY?

SIMMER

SIMMER

CRACKLE

CRACKLE

CRACKLE
CRACKLE
CRACKLE

?
...

IT'S ALMOST READY, DEAR.

YOU'RE HUNGRY, AREN'T YOU?

STEAM
STEAM

BWOOSH

MOTHER
?!

I'M
SORRY...

...

?

...I'VE DONE SOMETHING TERRIBLY CRUEL TO YOU, MY DEAR...

I'M AFRAID...

?!

EVER AGAIN.

...RELIEVED... NOW THAT I WON'T HAVE TO USE THAT *THING*...

BUT...

TO BE HONEST,

I'M...

...ALWAYS HATED USING THAT WHISTLE.

I...

WH... WHY?

HUH?

WERE THEY IN THE WILD, THEIR DESTINIES WOULD BE THEIR OWN, WHETHER THEY LIVED OR DIED...

BEASTS THAT HAVE BEEN FORCED UNDER THE CONTROL OF HUMANS ARE TRULY PITIFUL THINGS...

SEEING THE TODA SEIZE UP AND STIFFEN LIKE THAT...

I COULDN'T STAND IT.

AREN'T THEY GIVEN THE TOKUJISUI TO GET STRONGER?

DO THEY GET WEAKER WHEN RAISED BY HUMANS?

IT PAINED ME...

BUT WATCHING THEM GROW WEAKER DAY BY DAY...

BUT...

IT WEAKENS PARTS OF THEM, TOO.

THE TOKUJISUI MAKES THEIR FANGS HARDER...

AND THEIR BONES GROW LARGER THAN THEY WOULD IN THE WILD.

THE OTHER TODA STEWARDS DON'T KNOW ANY OF THIS.

I NEED YOU TO SWEAR THAT YOU WON'T REPEAT WHAT I SAID TO ANYONE.

NO...

FORGET WHAT I JUST SAID.

HUP

LIKE WHAT?

...

I SWEAR, MOTHER! SO PLEASE, TELL ME...

...WHAT PARTS OF THE TODA GET WEAKER?

...

THERE IS SOMETHING THAT TODA IN THE WILD CAN DO...

THAT THOSE WE KEEP IN OUR PONDS CANNOT.

THINK ABOUT IT, DEAR.

I KNOW THAT YOU'LL...

COME TO THE ANSWER YOURSELF SOMEDAY.

SWP

NOW,

LET'S HAVE SUPPER, SHALL WE?

YOU MUST KEEP IT A SECRET,

UNTIL YOU UNDER-STAND *WHY*...

YOU MUSTN'T SPEAK ABOUT IT.

BUT...

WHEN YOU DO FIGURE IT OUT, YOU MUST NOT TELL ANYONE.

WOOOW!

DO YOU LIKE IT?

AND GIVE THE FOOD A PLEASANT AROMA.

THEY REMOVE THE GAMY ODOR FROM MEAT...

WE USED THEM ALL THE TIME IN THE MOUNTAINS.

THE *LACOS* TREES KEEP THEIR LEAVES EVEN IN THE WINTER.

...WEREN'T LIVING IN THE VILLAGE...

WHEN YOU WERE LITTLE, RIGHT?

MOTHER, YOU...

KLINK

カタ..

SQUEEZE

MOTHER...

I SUPPOSE...

HUP

ドクン BA-DMP

ドクン BA-DMP

ドクン BA-DMP

...

DID YOU THINK IT WAS SOMETHING YOU COULDN'T ASK ABOUT?

...I'VE NEVER REALLY TOLD YOU MUCH ABOUT MYSELF, HAVE I?

TONIGHT, I'LL TELL YOU MORE ABOUT MYSELF... AND ABOUT YOUR FATHER, TOO.

YOU'RE AT AN AGE WHERE YOU CAN UNDERSTAND A LOT MORE NOW.

コクン NOD

YEAH...

TODAY, YOU HEARD YOUR GRAND-FATHER CALL ME...

AN *AHLYO*, RIGHT?

THEY SELL THEM POTENT POTIONS ...

AND ARE SKILLED IN THE HEALING ARTS.

THEY'RE A TALL PEOPLE WHO SEEM TO APPEAR OUT OF THE MIST AS QUICKLY AS THEY DISAPPEAR BACK INTO IT...

TO THE VILLAG-ERS...

BUT THEY BELIEVE IN STRANGE GODS...

AND ARE AN EERIE, DISTURBING LOT.

...THE NAME, *AHLYO*— "PEOPLE OF THE MIST"...

BUT...

COMES FROM A MISHEARING OF THEIR REAL NAME.

NOD

IS THAT HOW YOU SEE THEM, TOO?

BECAUSE THEY PRACTICE A PECULIAR WAY OF LIFE.

THEY PROBABLY SEEM THAT WAY FROM THE OUTSIDE...

PEOPLE ASSUMED THE NAME CAME FROM *AH,* MEANING "MIST," AND *LYO,* MEANING "THE PEOPLE."

BUT THEIR REAL NAME IS *AO-LOH.*

AO, FOR "OATH," AND *LOH,* FOR "GUARDIAN."

WHAT MISTAKE...?

"OATH"?

I WAS TAUGHT TO PROTECT THAT OATH AND TO CONSIDER IT EVEN MORE IMPORTANT THAN MY OWN LIFE...

YES, AN OATH... TO PREVENT A TERRIBLE MISTAKE THAT WAS MADE LONG, LONG AGO...

...OR MY FAMILY'S LIVES.

FROM EVER BEING REPEATED.

...

...

A TERRIFYING MISTAKE...

THAT ALMOST BROUGHT BOTH HUMAN AND BEAST TO EXTINCTION...

...IS TAUGHT TO STRICTLY ADHERE TO OUR LAWS.

GENER-ATION AFTER GENERA-TION...

FROM THE TIME WE'RE BORN, EVERY MEMBER OF OUR TRIBE...

SWEARING ALLEGIANCE TO NEITHER THE *YOJEH*, THE TRUE RULER, NOR THE ALUHAN, THE GRAND DUKE.

MY ANCESTORS BECAME WANDERERS OF THE MOUNTAINS, LIVING IN THE WILD...

IN ORDER TO PREVENT A DISASTER OF THAT MAGNITUDE FROM HAPPENING AGAIN,

SUCH ARE THE LAWS WE MUST FOLLOW.

WE MUST NEVER SETTLE AND LIVE IN ONE PLACE.

WE MUST NEVER MARRY OUTSIDE OF OUR PEOPLE.

...

I LOST MY PLACE AS AN AO-LOH.

AND DECIDED TO LIVE HERE, IN THIS VILLAGE...

EVER SINCE I MET YOUR FATHER...

BUT I BROKE THEM.

I'M CERTAIN YOU WILL UNDERSTAND ONE DAY.

THEN YOU CAN THINK BACK TO WHAT I'VE TOLD YOU WHEN YOU'RE OLDER.

I SUP-POSE IT WOULD BE.

YEAH...

IS IT DIFFICULT FOR YOU TO UNDERSTAND ALL THIS...?

...

ELIN.

POMF

POMF

WAS THAT FATHER?

I WAS SEARCHING FOR THE *CHACHIMO* FLOWER THAT BLOOMS AT THE ROCKS.

BUT INSTEAD, I FOUND A YOUNG MAN, LYING UNCONSCIOUS, HALFWAY DOWN THE CLIFF.

I MET YOUR FATHER...

AT THE ROCKS OF SAMOCK.

HE'D HIT HIS HEAD HARD WHEN HE FELL,

AND HIS LEG WAS BROKEN.

HE WAS.

WAS FATHER HURT?

HE'D SLIPPED WHEN HE WAS HUNTING DEER.

YES.

THAT WAS HOW I MET YOUR FATHER.

I DID.

AND YOU SAVED HIM, DIDN'T YOU?!

HE DIDN'T SPEAK MUCH,

BUT HIS SMILE WAS SO WARM, IT FELT LIKE ALL THE CLOUDS IN THE SKY WOULD PART FOR HIS LAUGHTER.

ASSON...

HE WAS SUCH A KIND, GENTLE MAN.

ELIN...

JUST BEING NEAR YOU WARMS MY HEART.

...YOU'RE JUST LIKE YOUR FATHER.

IS IT TRUE THAT ALL TEN OF THE KIBA, THE GRAND DUKE'S INVALUABLE TREASURES...

PERISHED?

KER-SHAN

KER-SHAN

FWSH

BRRRL

BA-DUMP

BA-DUMP

KER-SHAN

WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CARE OF THE KIBA?!

STEP FORWARD AT ONCE!

FLINCH

TWITCH

TWITCH

...

YES. IT'S TRUE, SIR.

I HAVE NO MEANS OF ATONING FOR THIS TERRIBLE EVENT.

AN AHLYO?!

!

UNBELIEV-ABLE!

THAT WOULD BE ME, SIR.

THIS WOMAN IS AN OUTSTANDING DOCTOR—

BUT...

THWACK

I-I'M TERRIBLY SORRY, SIR!

HOW COULD YOU LET AN AHLYO, OF ALL PEOPLE, OVERSEE THE ALUHAN'S TREASURES?!

WHAT WERE YOU THINKING?!

THE AHLYO POSSESS FREAKISH ABILITIES IN THE HEALING ARTS!

OF COURSE SHE IS!

"AN OUTSTANDING DOCTOR," YOU SAY?!

HUSH

...

IS TO HAVE UNWAVERING LOYALTY TO OUR ALUHAN!

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING...

HOWEVER!

AS THE CHIEF STEWARD, HOW CAN YOU NOT BE AWARE OF THAT?!

YOU CANNOT ALLOW JUST *ANYONE* TO CARE FOR THE TODA BECAUSE OF THEIR ABILITY!

YOU BELIEVE THAT'S ENOUGH FOR ME TO TRUST HER?!

HAH!

SHE IS NO LONGER A FOLLOWER OF THE AHLYO LAWS, AND IS A LOYAL SUBJECT TO THE ALUHAN.

THIS WOMAN MARRIED MY SON OVER TEN YEARS AGO, AND HAS BECOME A MEMBER OF OUR VILLAGE SINCE.

MY APOLOGIES, SIR...

THAT THEY WOULD KILL EVEN *THEIR OWN CHILDREN* IF THEY WERE EVER TO BREAK THEM.

I'VE HEARD THE AHLYO HOLD THEIR LAWS ABOVE ALL ELSE...

SPEAK!

WHY IS IT THAT ONLY THE KIBA UNDER *YOUR* CARE DIED?!

IF YOU REALLY ARE THAT SKILLED A DOCTOR, THEN TELL ME *HOW* THEY DIED!

WERE THEY FED SOMETHING POISONOUS?!

"POI-SONED"?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

NO, SIR.

HUSH

...THE KIBA WERE POISONED.

MY APOLOGIES, SIR...

THE TODA'S PROTECTIVE COATING OF MUCUS CONTAINS SUBSTANCES THAT MODERATE THE EFFECT OF THOSE INGREDIENTS. WHEN THE TOKUJISUI IS ABSORBED INTO THE BODY AFTER COMBINING WITH THOSE SUBSTANCES...

AS ALL TODA STEWARDS KNOW...

THE TODA ONLY ACQUIRES ITS HEALTHY BENEFITS.

THERE ARE SOME POTENT INGREDIENTS IN THE TOKUJISUI GIVEN TO THE KIBA.

DURING MY MIDNIGHT ROUNDS THE NIGHT BEFORE, THEIR BODIES HAD BEEN PRODUCING MUCUS LIKE NORMAL, SO I HAD ADMINISTERED THE TOKUJISUI AS USUAL...

HOWEVER, YESTERDAY MORNING, THE TODA'S MUCUS COATING APPEARED TO HAVE THINNED IN PLACES.

WHY...?

YOU'RE SAYING THAT IN JUST A FEW HOURS, THEIR BODIES CHANGED ENOUGH FOR THE TOKUJISUI TO POISON THEM?

...I DO NOT KNOW, SIR.

WE WILL HAVE HER QUESTIONED AND PUNISHED!

SEIZE THAT WENCH!

MOTHER!!

GRAB

!

YOU CAN'T! YOU HAVE TO STAY HERE!

...!

I DON'T REMEMBER MUCH...

...ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED IN THE NEXT THREE DAYS.

I COULDN'T WRAP MY HEAD AROUND ANY OF IT...

EVERYTHING FELT SO FAR AWAY...

SHHH!

KEEP YOUR VOICE DOWN.

WE DON'T WANT TO WAKE THE CHILDREN!

FLINCH

WILL SHE BE SENTENCED TO THE JUDGMENT OF THE TODA TOMORROW AT DAWN?

IN THAT CASE ...

...

...

...

WHISPER

WHISPER

SHE DOESN'T DESERVE SUCH A TERRIBLE DEATH SENTENCE...

BUT THAT'S JUST TOO CRUEL...

THAT MUST BE WHY HE'S TRYING TO PUSH ALL THE BLAME ONTO SOHYON.

THEN THE ALUHAN WILL HOLD HIM PERSONALLY RESPONSIBLE.

IF THE INSPECTOR CAN'T EXPLAIN HOW ONLY THE KIBA DIED...

YEAH... THAT MUST BE WHY.

BUT IT'S STILL JUST FAR TOO CRUEL...

...TO CONDEMN HER TO BE DEVOURED BY WILD TODA...

THE BEAST PLAYER

...to condemn her to be devoured by wild toda...

HAAH

But it's still just far too cruel...

CLACK

BA-DMP

TREMBLE TREMBLE

HAAH

BA-DMP

HAAH

BA-DMP

TMP TMP TMP

I NEED TO SAVE MOTHER...

...OR ELSE SHE'S GOING TO BE EATEN BY WILD TODA AT DAWN...

BUT THIS IS A DAGGER THAT CAN CUT THROUGH TODA SCALES...

IF I BRING THIS WITH ME, THEN...!!

KLUNK

IT'S HEAVY...

ZNSH

Prologue 3
Sohyon's Finger Flute

HAA

FSH

HAA

HH

RUSTLE

THWUD

!

SLIP

HH

RUSTLE

HH

RUSTLE

MOTHER...

CLENCH

...

...WHEN SHE WAS A CHILD, AFTER ALL.

THAT'S HOW MOTHER USED TO LIVE...

...WE CAN BOTH LEAVE THE VILLAGE AND LIVE AS WANDERERS.

ONCE I SAVE HER...

WHERE?!

THEY MUST BE BY THE DRUM...!

FLAP

FLAP

FLAP

QUIVER

QUIVER

QUIVER

BOOOOM

BOOOOM

BOOOOM

MOTHER!!

THWAK

!

TERRIBLE...

I'LL SAVE YOU, MOTHER!!

THEY'RE TERRIBLE!

BOOOOM

YANK

...

DO IT.

...

HFF

HFF

SPLASH

WHAT'S THAT... OVER THERE?

A PUPPY?

HEY.

FINALLY OVER, HUH?

THERE WE GO...

MURMUR ざわ

IT'S A CHILD!

THAT'S NO DOG...

NO...

THERE IS NO NEED.

TAKE A LOOK ...

SHALL I SHOOT HER?

...

IT LOOKS LIKE SOME SORT OF BLADE...

SHE'S GOT SOMETHING IN HER MOUTH.

IS SHE TRYING TO SAVE THAT CRIMINAL?

THE TODA THAT WOKE FROM THE SOUND OF THE DRUM...

...HAVE FINALLY NOTICED WHAT WE THREW INTO THE WATER FOR THEM.

GLORSH

HAA

GLORP

HAA

HAAH

HAAH

!

...

HAA

HAA

HAA

BWAGH!

HAAH

HAAH

I WON'T LAST MUCH LONGER...

...WITH THESE INJURIES...

I FEEL MY STRENGTH LEAVING ME... FROM MY OPEN WOUND...

?

HA

HAA

!

ELIN!!

ELIN?!

ELIN!!

THE DAGGER !!

HAA

WHAT IS THAT IN YOUR MOUTH...?

HAA

GET ON MY SHOULDERS!

GRAB ONTO ME! HURRY!

ELIN!

...THE TODA!

GWIP

PLK

PLK

PLK

YOUR...

ROPES...

HF!

M...

MOTHER...

HAA

HAAH

HAAH

COUGH

HAAH

SPLASH

ELIN!

THANK YOU...

THANK YOU!!

GASP

I'LL CUT THEM MYSELF. GIVE ME THE DAGGER...

HERE,

WHAT ABOUT YOUR FEET?

M-MOTHER...

...NO TIME...

THERE'S...

BUT ELIN...

I NEVER INTENDED TO SURVIVE THIS FROM THE START.

THERE IS A WAY THAT I CAN AT LEAST SAVE ELIN.

BUT...

HUP

TUG

ONE THAT MAY BRING ABOUT A HORRIFYING CALAMITY...

...IT WOULD BE A TERRIBLE SIN, EVEN IF IT WAS TO SAVE MY OWN DAUGHTER...

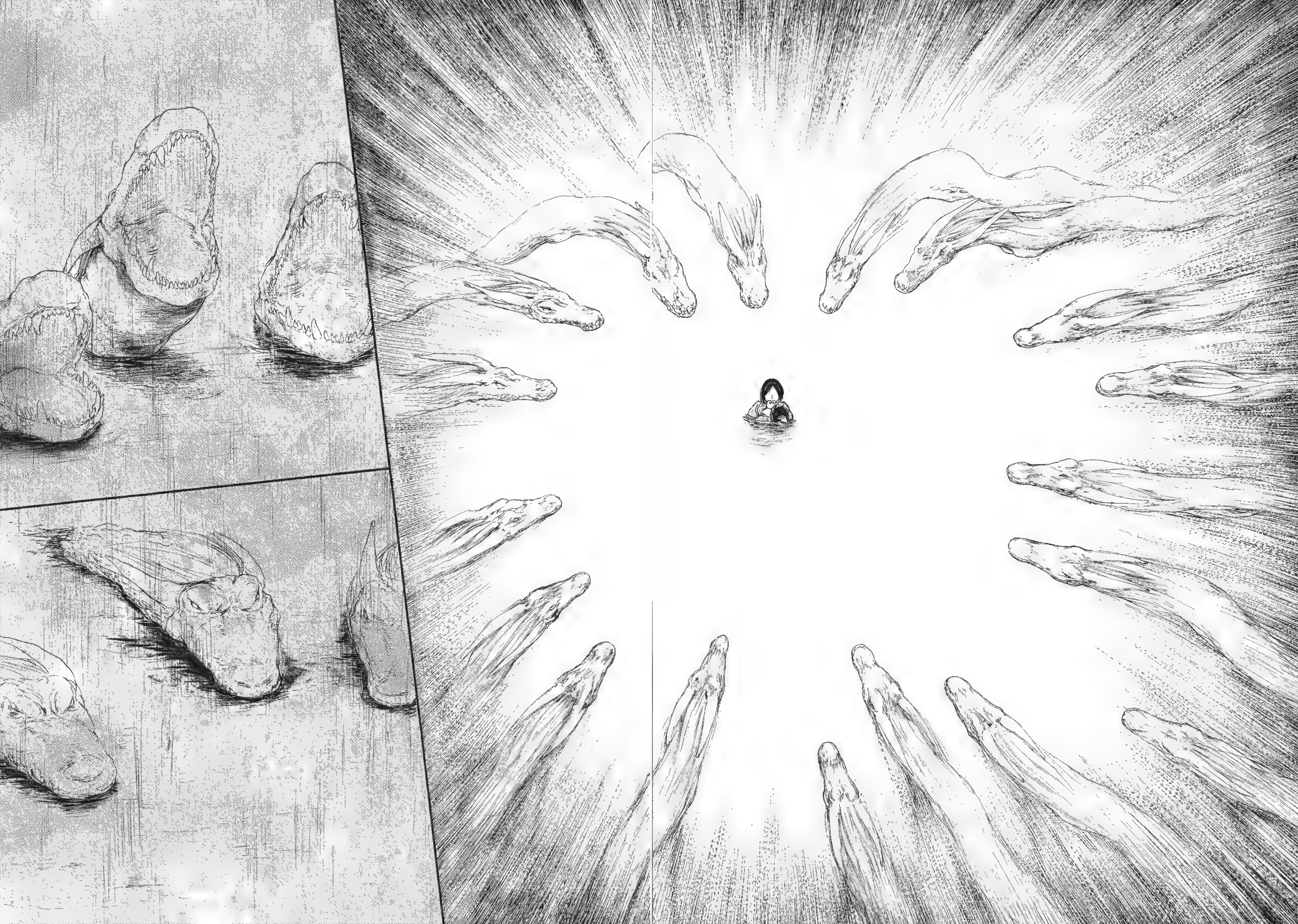
YOU MUST *NEVER* COPY WHAT I'M ABOUT TO DO.

ELIN...

SQUEEZE

YOUR MOTHER IS GOING TO COMMIT A TERRIBLE CRIME.

YOU MUST SURVIVE AND FIND YOUR HAPPINESS, MY DEAR.



BUT ...

THE TODA HAVE STOPPED MOVING.

HOW COULD A FINGER WHISTLE AFFECT THEM LIKE THAT?

IT LOOKS LIKE SHE'S USING HER FINGERS TO WHISTLE.

I DON'T KNOW.

WHAT IS THAT WOMAN DOING?

WHA...?

EVEN A SILENT WHISTLE CAN'T STOP *WILD* TODA...

NO...

THAT CAN'T BE...

SLOSH

TO

TWITCH

AAAA AAAH!!

CLIMB ONTO THE TODA'S BACK!

GRAB HOLD OF ITS HORNS!

ELIN!

!

DON'T EVER LET GO OF THE HORNS!

HOLD TIGHT WITH BOTH OF YOUR LEGS!

CLENCH

AHH...!

SLCSHH

HH!

ヒュウウウ

MOTHER ?!

HUH...?!

MOTHER!

GO!

DON'T LOOK BACK!

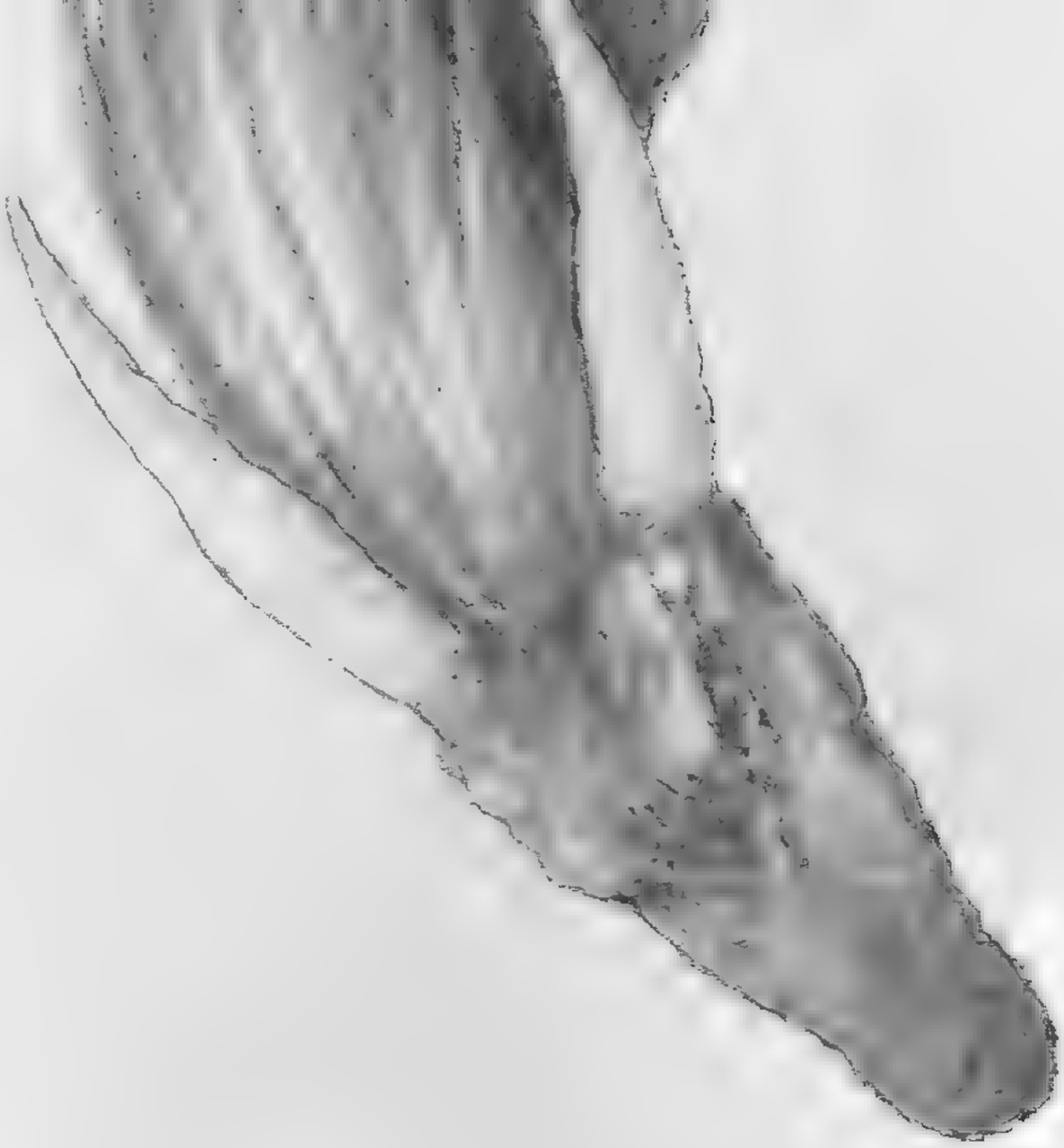
GO!

MOTHER!!

...

MO...THER...!

PLAYER
ONE



CHIIF

CH'K?

SNAP

CHIIF

CHIIF

CHIIF

...!

SPIRIT BIRDS!

SIVM

Prologue 4
The Spirit Beast

...

...

CHIIP
CHIIP
CHIIP
CHIIP
CHIIP
CHIIP
CHIIP
CHIIP
CHIIP
CHIIP

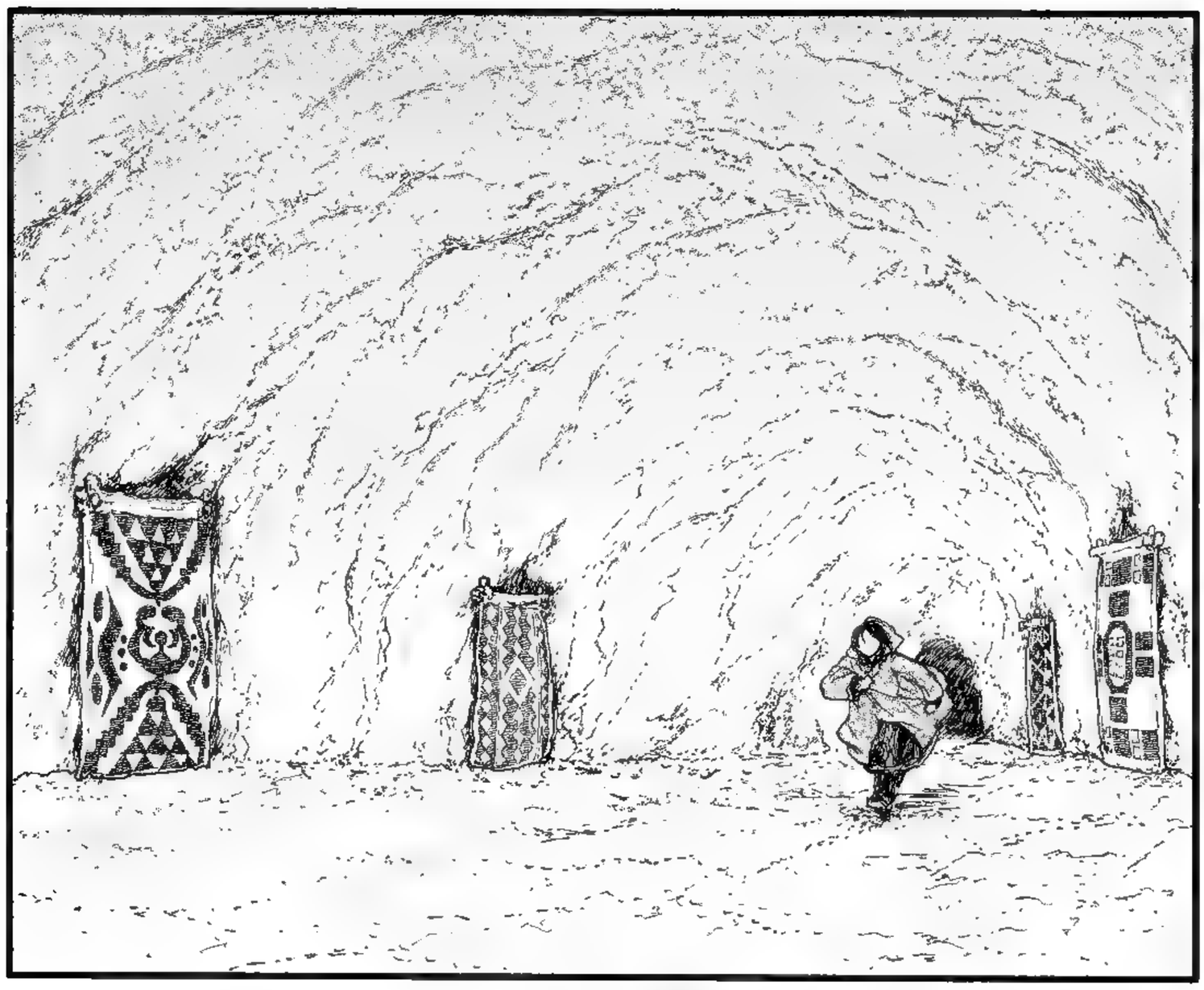
A10
GLOW

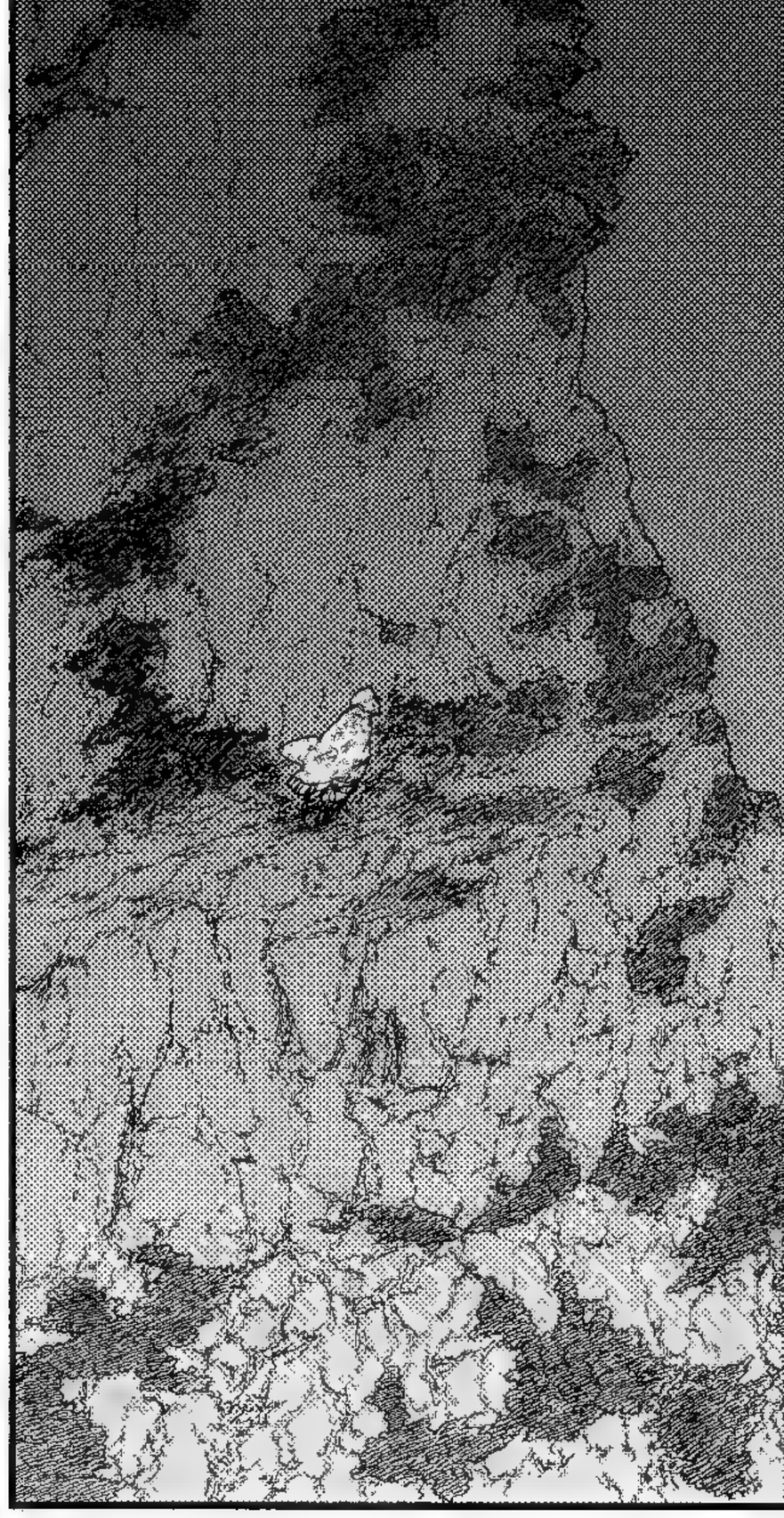
HOOT
HOOT

...

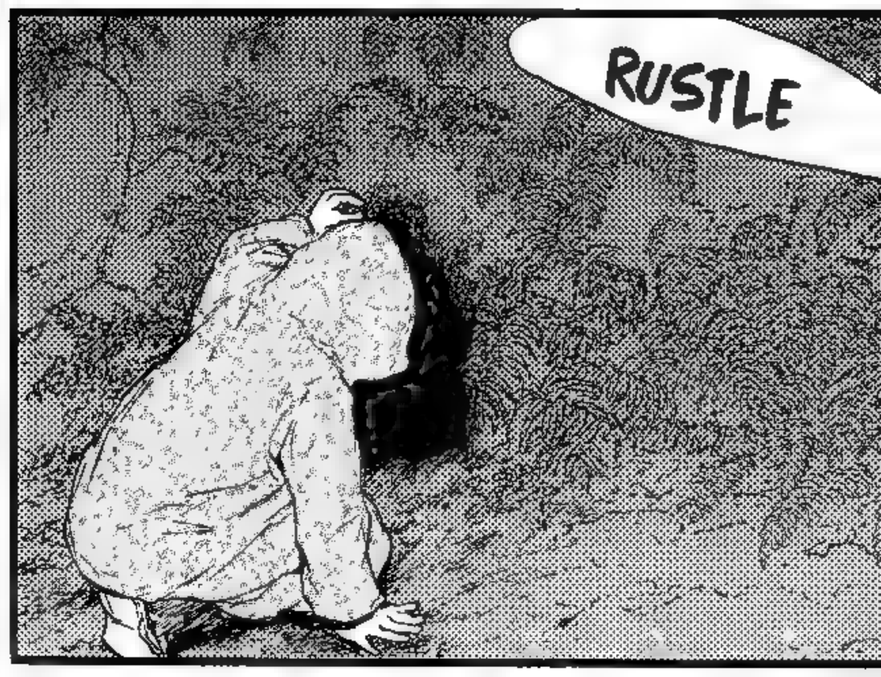
DASH

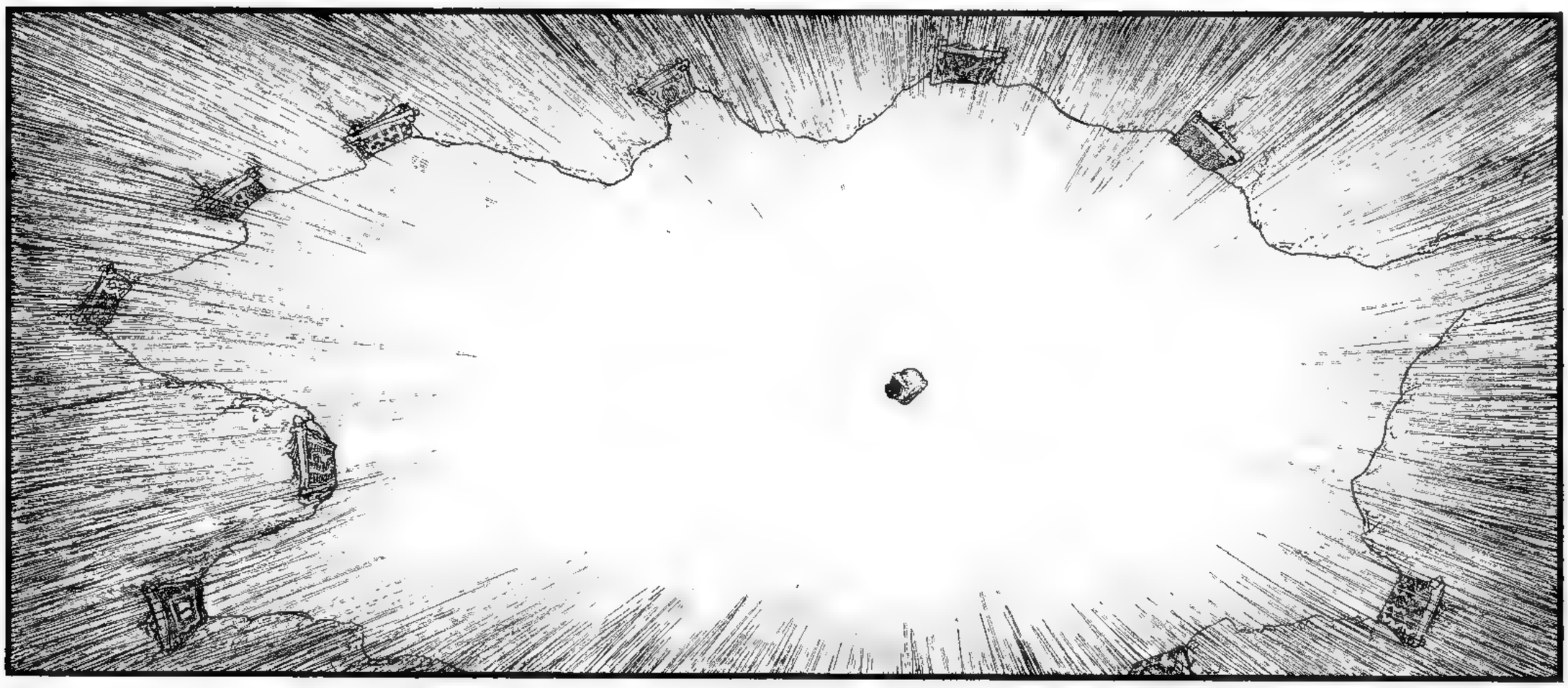
MUTTER
MUTTER





SSSST
HAAH
HAAH


RUSTLE



RUSTLE

RUSTLE

RUSTLE

SWP

WHAT IS IT?

!

MURMUR

ざわ..

...TAKE HOLD OF AN ANTLERED BEAST... A SPIRIT BEAST...

AND IT SPOKE TO ME.

I...

I SAW SPIRIT BIRDS...

GLARE

キロ..

HADN'T THEY ALL DIED OUT...?

AMAZ-ING...

THERE ARE STILL SPIRIT BEASTS IN THESE FORESTS?

WHAT DID THE SPIRIT BEAST...

...SAY TO YOU?

"SOMEONE USED THE *HANDLER'S ART...*

AND WHISTLED TO THE TODA"...

IS WHAT I HEARD.

I'M YET INEXPERIENCED... I WORRY I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND THE SPIRIT BEAST CORRECTLY... BUT...

GULP

ドド

!

EVERYONE ELSE, RETURN TO YOUR CHAMBERS!

WE WILL INFORM YOU OF OUR DELIB-ERATIONS AFTER!

THE ELDERS WILL MEET AT ONCE!

IS THAT ALL THE SPIRIT BEAST SAID?

YES.

THAT WAS IT.

...SOHYON WAS THE ONE WHO BETRAYED OUR OATH.

IF IT WAS THE TODA FINGER WHISTLE THAT WAS USED,

THEN THAT MUST MEAN...

FOR HOW I RAISED MY DAUGHTER!

IT IS ENTIRELY MY RESPONSI-BILITY...

MY DEEPEST APOLOGIES!

FWSH

I WOULD NEVER HAVE THOUGHT SHE'D USE THE HANDLER'S ART...

...AND STRONG GIRL...

WAS A CLEVER, KIND...

SOHYON ...

WE MUST MAKE HASTE.

YES. SUMMON THE SCOUT.

AND UNDER-STAND THE SITUATION.

BUT FIRST, WE MUST INVESTI-GATE...

AND FORCE US TO SHARE THE ART.

IF THAT HAPPENS, THE ALUHAN WILL SEARCH FOR US...

IF SHE WHISTLED IN FRONT OF SOME-ONE...

THEN THE NEWS WILL SURELY REACH THE ALUHAN'S EARS IN DUE TIME.

IF SHE REVEALED THAT WE ARE CAPABLE OF CONTROLLING THE TODA...

THEY MUST EXERCISE EXTREME CAUTION UNTIL WE HAVE A BETTER GRASP OF THE SITUATION.

INFORM THEM THAT THEY ARE NOT TO DESCEND DOWN TO THE VILLAGES...

WE MUST TELL ALL OF OUR PEOPLE...

TO KEEP THEMSELVES HIDDEN.

RUSTLE

!

...HAS ALREADY BEEN EXECUTED...

I SEE...

SO SOHYON...

THE INSPECTOR HEAPED THE FULL BLAME OF THE TODA'S DEATHS ON SOHYON, AND SHE WAS EXECUTED AS A SCAPEGOAT FOR ALLEGEDLY INTENTIONALLY KILLING THE CREATURES.

BUT...

IT WAS... A TERRIBLE WAY TO DIE.

AFTER INVESTIGATING, IT WAS CLEAR THAT THE TODA'S MUCUS HAD CHANGED...

THAT THE TODA HAD REACHED THEIR ***BREEDING SEASON.***

...IRONICALLY, SOHYON LIKELY ***WAS*** CONNECTED TO THE TODA'S DEATHS.

SHE KNEW THAT ADMINISTERING THE TOKUJISUI WHEN THE KIBA'S MUCUS WAS THIN WOULD POISON THEM...

SHE KNEW, YET SHE STILL DID IT.

CLEVER SOHYON WOULD MOST DEFINITELY HAVE NOTICED.

...

!

ざわ...

MURMUR

SOHYON DID IT...

TO KEEP OUR OATH.

SHE CHOSE TO LET THE TODA DIE IN ORDER TO PROTECT OUR SECRET.

ALTHOUGH SHE KNEW THAT SHE WOULD BE EXECUTED FOR HER CRIMES...

YOUR DAUGHTER HAD NOT ABANDONED HER ROLE AS A MEMBER OF OUR TRIBE.

AT THE VERY LAST MOMENT, SHE GAVE IN TO HER PARENTAL LOVE.

HOWEVER...

SHE COULDN'T BEAR TO SEE HER OWN CHILD...

BE RIPPED APART BY THE TODA.

WHAT HAPPENED...

TO SOHYON'S DAUGHTER?

...

FURTHERMORE, SHE IS BUT A TEN-YEAR-OLD CHILD.

SHE COULD NOT HAVE HELD ON TO THE TODA FOREVER...

IT WILL BE DIFFICULT FOR HIM TO FIND HER.

BUT THE CHANNELS THERE BRANCH AND INTERSECT IN A VERY COMPLICATED MANNER.

NAHSON IS FOLLOWING HER TRAIL...

...NONE WERE TO SPEAK ABOUT SOHYON BEING AN AHLYO.

I OVERHEARD THE VILLAGERS SAYING THAT HE HAD DECREED THAT...

HOW SO?

ALTHOUGH MY HEART GOES OUT TO SOHYON AND HER YOUNG DAUGHTER...

WE ARE FORTUNATE THAT THE INSPECTOR IS QUITE THE COWARD.

PLEASE KEEP AN EYE ON THE INSPECTOR'S NEXT MOVES.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR EFFORTS.

I SEE...

PHEW...

...SOHYON BROKE OUR OATH.

WE MUST NOT ALLOW OUR ART TO BRING CALAMITY UPON THE WORLD.

REGARDLESS OF HER REASONS...

WE BEST LEAVE THIS LAND FOR THE TIME BEING AND GO INTO HIDING IN THE MOUNTAINS.

SIGHTINGS OF OUR PEOPLE MAY GIVE THEM KINDLING.

EVEN IF RUMORS OF THIS INCIDENT NEVER REACH THE ALUHAN,

UNTIL THE RUMORS THAT HAVE BEEN SPARKED...

ARE FINALLY DOUSED.

FwssSHHH

I HAVE A GOOD FEELING ABOUT THIS YEAR.

I'M SURE I CAN HARVEST SOME DELICIOUS HONEY.

?

...

WHAT'S THAT?

HUH?

STEP 10...

WHAT SHOULD I DO...?

WHAT A THING TO FIND SO EARLY IN THE MORNING ...

...

A BODY ...?

...

GASP!

!

FROM

THIS SWEET SCENT...

...A TODA?!

...WHERE IS THIS SMELL COMING FROM...?

THEN...

...

IT...DOESN'T SEEM LIKE IT...

...

POOR THING...

SHE LOOKS LIKE SHE'S JUST A LITTLE GIRL...

!

SSST

SHE'S ALIVE!

SST

CAN YOU FEEL ANYTHING?!

DO YOU HEAR ME?!

...

HEY!

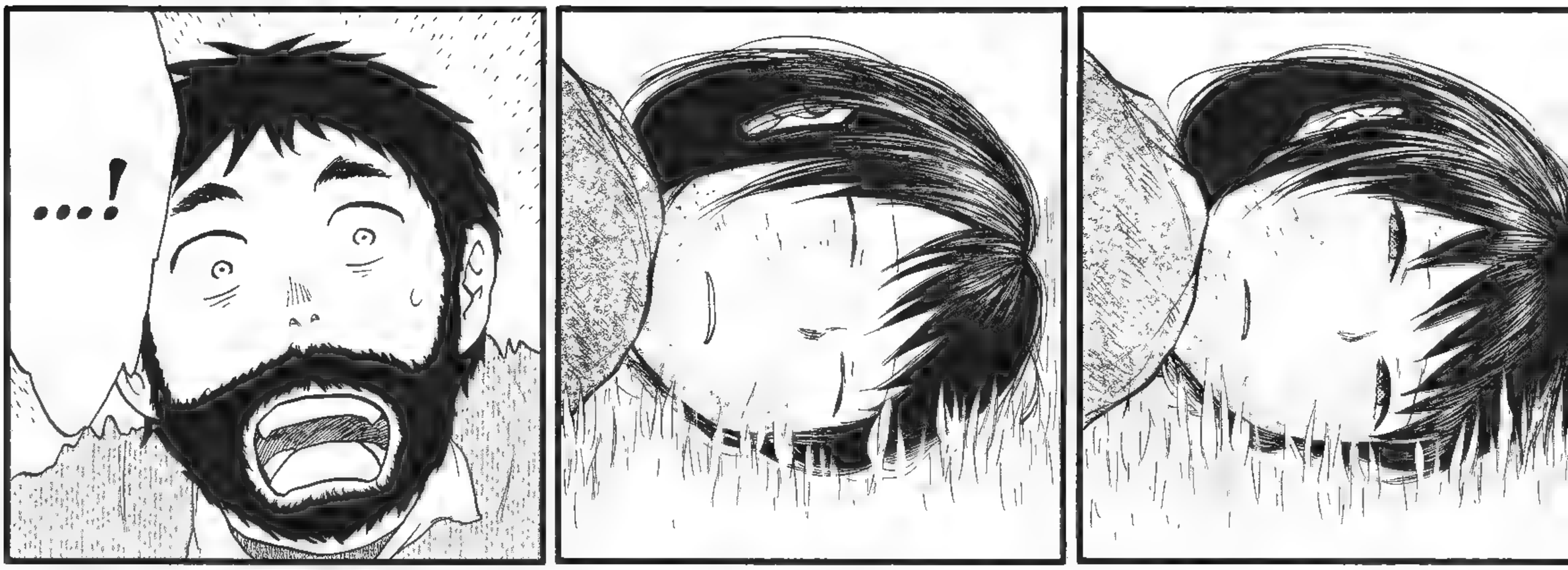
GIRL!

OPEN YOUR EYES!

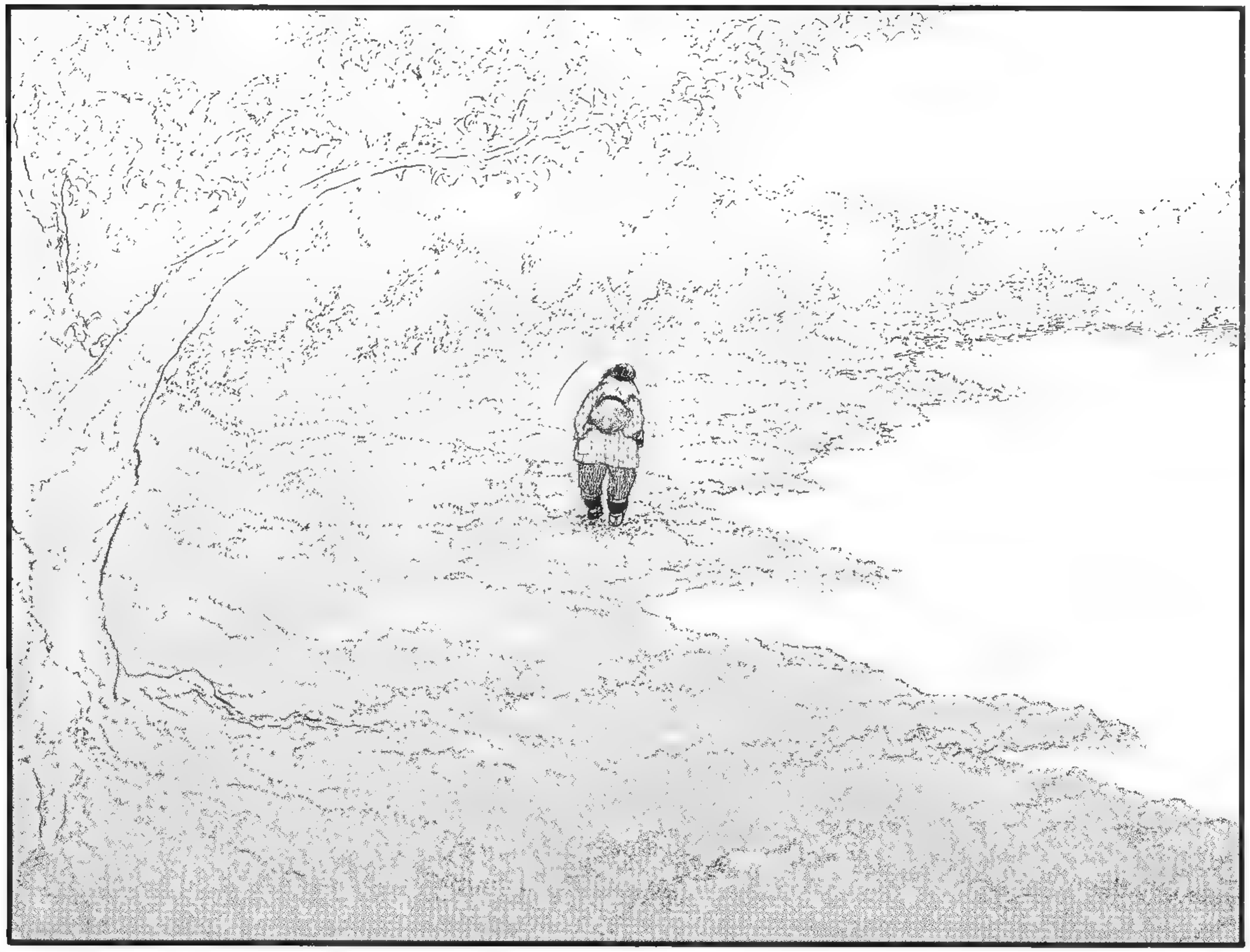
SLAP

SLAP

SLAP


...!

TUG
COME, NOW...
HEY...



THE BEAST PLAYER

!

ズゾゾ
SHLRP

ズズ
SHLRSH

MOTH-
ER...

SHLRP

ズ
ズ

...

MOTHER...?

ズキン
THROB

SNIF

SNFF

ズキン
THROB

IT
HURTS...

IT
HURTS SO
MUCH...

SNF

HIC
...

Elin...

HUSH

MOTHER!

GLUB

GLORP

!

ｱﾌﾟｱﾌﾟ...

GLRP GLRP

ｱﾌﾟ GINOOSH

!

THE TODA!!

?

Elin...

WHERE ARE THEY GOING?

MOTHER?!

Go...

...Elin.

MOTHER!!

Chapter 1 Section 1
Washed Ashore

AAAAAAAH

NOOOOOOO!

IT'S ALL RIGHT.

SWITCH

IT'S ALL RIGHT...

IT'S JUST A DREAM.

YOU'RE JUST DREAMING.

THERE'S NOTHING TO BE SCARED OF.

POFF

POFF

POFF

SWOO

SWOO

...

チュン CHIRP

チュン CHIRP

もそ…
RUSTLE

…

SNOOOORE
ボゴー

SNRK

FWOOM

SNOOORE

GONK

WH...

WHAT HAPPENED?

UGH ...

HMF—!

...

GIGGLE

HA HA HA

GIGGLE

DON'T LAUGH...

...

HEY...

HOW DO YOU FEEL? ALL RIGHT?

YOU'RE LOOKING A LOT BETTER.

LOOKS LIKE YOUR FEVER'S BROKEN.

CAN YOU SHOW ME THE INJURIES ON YOUR LEGS?

I SEE.

NOD コクン

IT SHOULDN'T TAKE LONG FOR THEM TO FULLY HEAL NOW.

THE SWELLING HAS GONE DOWN.

BA-DMP ドキン

BUT YOU MANAGED TO COME BACK TO THE LAND OF THE LIVING.

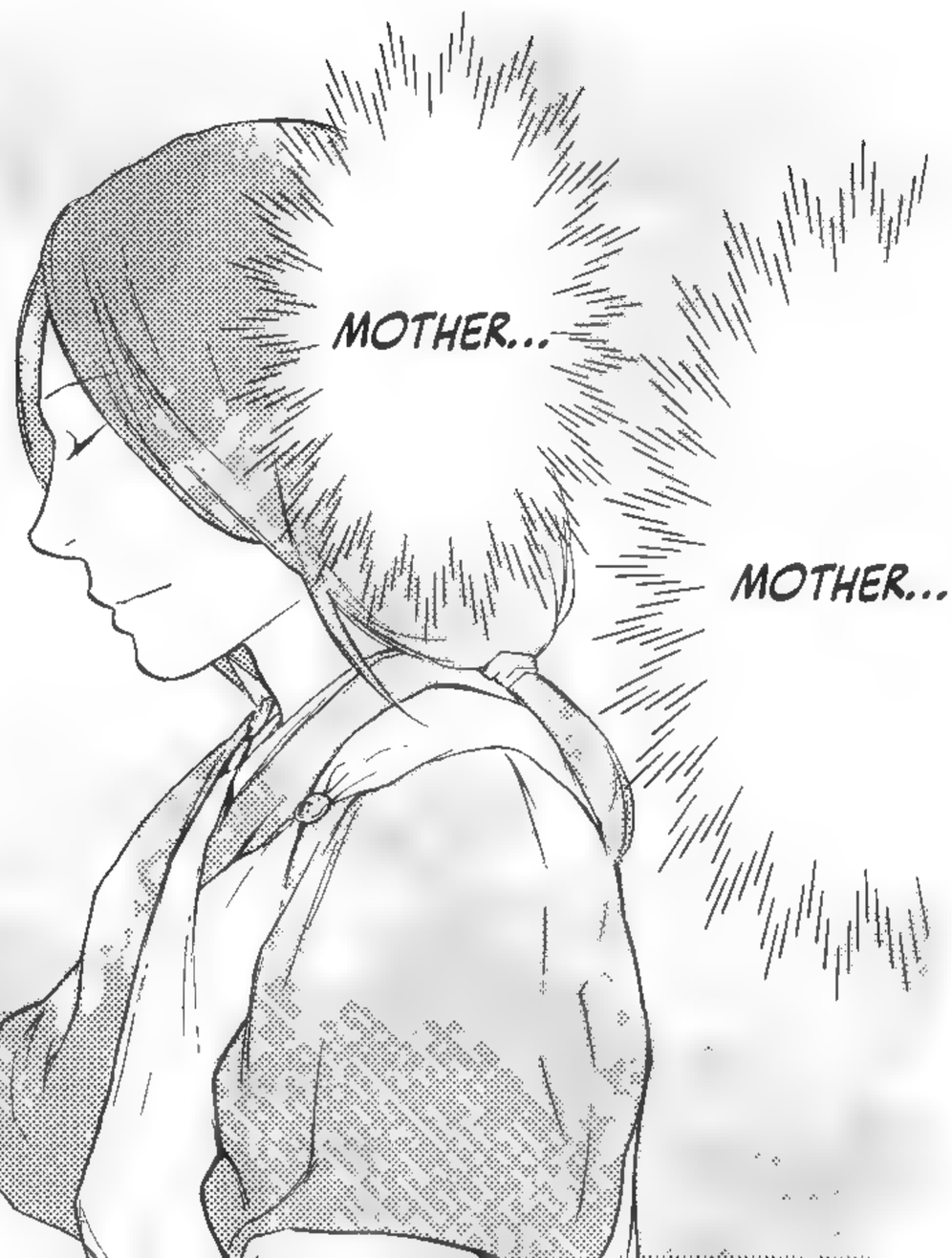
YOU WERE TEETERING BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH...

YOU'RE QUITE THE LUCKY CHILD, YOU KNOW?

HAAH
THROB
HAAH
THROB

...MOTHER...

MOTHER!!


MOTHER...
MOTHER...

SOB...

SNIFF...

HIC!

THE MORE TEARS THAT FLOW OUT OF YOUR EYES...

THE LESS SADNESS WILL REMAIN.

YOU CAN CRY AS MUCH AS YOU WANT.

WHAT IS CAUSING YOU SO MUCH GRIEF.

AND ONE DAY, YOU'LL FINALLY BE ABLE TO FORGET ABOUT...

POMF

...THEN I'LL FORGET...

...ABOUT MOTHER...?

IF...I KEEP CRYING...

...

GASP

WIPE

WIPE

I DON'T EVER WANT TO FORGET ABOUT HER!!

...

COUGH

HAK COUGH

HA K

WHOA,

HEY!

IT'S OKAY TO CRY!

...DON'T WANT...

TO CRY...

...

I...

WHAT'S THE MATTER,

HUH?

YOU DON'T?

WHAT?

...

...

TOMP

TOMP

TOMP

WELL ALL RIGHT,

THEN...

!

WOBBLE

SNRFF

RUSTLE もそ..

...

...

I'M SO DIZZY...

IF IT...

... DOESN'T STOP?

WHAT...

WHAT DO I DO...?

...

POMF ぼふ

...

WELL?

CAN YOU EAT?

TMP トン TMP トン

GRODOWL

...

THAT SMELLS NICE...

SNIFF...

SIMMER コトコト

SIMMER コトコト

HERE,

TRY SOME BREAKFAST.

!!

じゅうううう…

SHARRRR

IS IT GOOD?

NOD

NOD

YEAH! IT'S DELICIOUS, ISN'T IT?!

IT'S MADE WITH THE HONEY THAT MY CUTE LITTLE WORKER BEES...

WORKED DILIGENTLY TO PRODUCE!

THE BEST IN ALL THE LAND!

...

OH!

WHAT...

IS THIS?

IT'S SOAKED IN HONEY ...

IT'S SO GOOD ...

...THEN KNEADED INTO A DOUGH WITH SOME WATER, AND BAKED.

GRAIN IS GROUND INTO A FLOUR...

IT SMELLS AND TASTES DELICIOUS, DOESN'T IT?

THIS IS *FAHKO*.

IT'S A COMMON FOOD AROUND THESE PARTS.

NORMALLY EAT FOR BREAKFAST?

WHAT DO *YOU*...

SO...

...

SO YOU'RE FROM...

...THE ALUHAN'S DOMAIN, THEN? YOU'RE A *WAJAK?*

IS THAT RIGHT?

RICE...

AND SOUP.

THEY'RE BLESSED WITH ABUNDANT WATER AND RICH VALLEYS AND PLAINS.

RICE CAN BE GROWN QUITE WELL THERE.

THE ALUHAN'S LANDS ARE FAR MORE VAST THAN THE YOJEH'S, WHERE WE LIVE.

IT'S MOUNTAINOUS AROUND HERE.

WE CAN GROW WHEAT AND BARLEY BETTER THAN RICE IN THIS ENVIRONMENT,

WHICH IS WHY WE MAINLY EAT FAHKO.

THIS IS SANOLU COUNTY, ON THE EASTERN EDGE OF THE YOJEH'S LAND.

THIS...

ISN'T THE ALUHAN'S LAND?

...WHERE ARE YOUR PARENTS, CHILD?

I SEE...SO YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW WHERE YOU ARE...

WHY WERE YOU LYING BY THE LAKE?

WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU?

AND COVERED IN SO MUCH MUD...

DO YOU NOT HAVE...

OR FAMILY AT ALL?

PARENTS?

...

WHAT SHOULD I CALL YOU?

I HOPE YOU'LL AT LEAST TELL ME YOUR NAME.

BUT...

I AM JOEUN.

...IF YOU DON'T WANT TO TALK,

YOU DON'T HAVE TO TELL ME ANYTHING.

FWOOSH

WHOOM

MY NAME IS ELIN!

THANK YOU SO MUCH...

FOR SAVING MY LIFE.

THAT'S A WONDERFUL NAME.

...

ELIN, HUH? AS IN, "MOUNTAIN APPLE"?

HER PARENTS MUST HAVE BEEN ARTISANS, IF NOT SOME PERSONS OF EVEN HIGHER STATUS.

...SHE CAN'T BE THE DAUGHTER OF WANDERERS OR TRAVELING PERFORMERS.

HER BOW, HER MANNERS, AND HER SPEECH...

...THAT COLOR IN HER EYES... SHE MUST BE AN AHLYO...

HOW DID A GIRL LIKE HER END UP IN HER STATE...?

AND...

NEVER WED OUTSIDE OF THEIR OWN PEOPLE.

I HEARD THAT THE AHLYO...

OR RATH-ER...

WOULD ONE ACTUALLY HAVE A CHILD WITH AN AHLYO?

ARTISANS DO NOT TAKE KINDLY TO WANDERERS...

...COULD POSSIBLY SURROUND THIS CHILD?

WHAT...

CIRCUM-STANCES...

BOW

YOU SHOULD EAT UP.

YOU'VE JUST RECOVERED FROM YOUR FEVER.

REGARDLESS, I'M CERTAIN I'LL LEARN MORE ABOUT HER WITH TIME.

ALL RIGHT,

I HAVEN'T HAD MUCH SLEEP,

SO I'M GOING TO TAKE A NAP.

YOU SHOULD TAKE IT EASY FOR TODAY AS WELL.

The outhouse is to the right from the door.

SNOOORE

...OR THE CRYING VOICE OF SAJU'S LITTLE SISTER...

I CAN'T HEAR THE SOUND OF THE TODA STEWARDS' BELL...

BAAAAH

ZZZ

SNOOOORE

ROLL

IS WHERE THE PEOPLE WHO STOOD BY AND WATCHED MY MOTHER DIE LIVE...

THAT VILLAGE ...

IT'S A VILLAGE WITHOUT MY MOTHER ANYMORE...

SHAKE

SHAKE

WHAT DO I DO?

I HAVE TO GET BA—

...SUPPOSED TO DO FROM NOW ON...?

BA-DMP

BA-DMP

WHAT...

AM I...

MOTH-ER...

Chapter 1 Section 2

The Flight of the Queen

ピク
TWITCH

チュン CHIRP

チュン CHIRP

ガチャ
GA-CHAK

TNK

OH!

YOU'RE AWAKE.

...BUT THEY RECOVER JUST AS FAST.

CHILDREN GET SICK EASILY...

WOULD YOU LIKE TO STEP OUT OF THE HOUSE TODAY?

NOD

NOD

HMM...

YOU'RE LOOKING A LOT BETTER THAN YES-TERDAY.

...THIS?

WHAT IS...

?

...

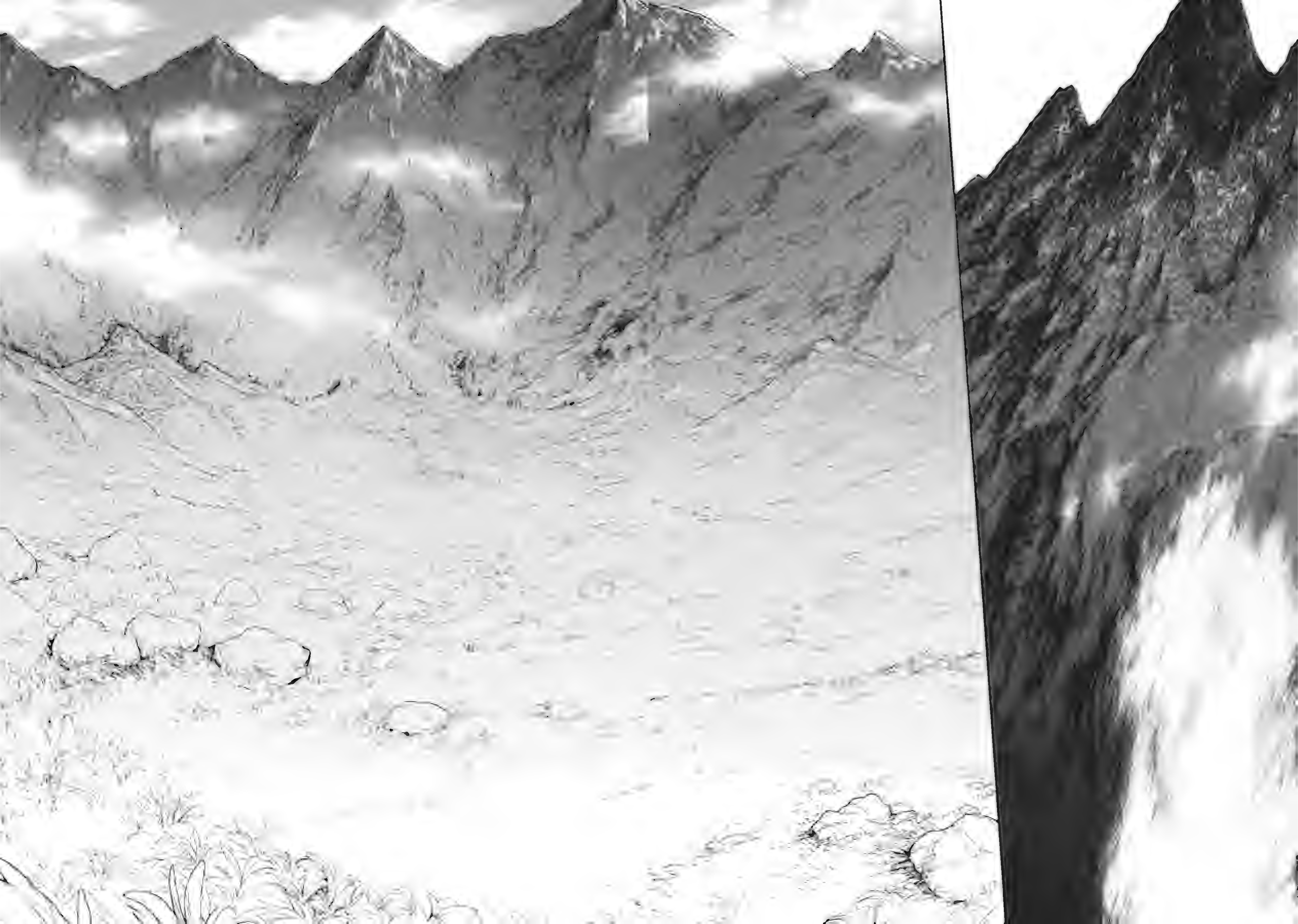
ALL RIGHT, HERE.

WELL,

YOU'LL SEE WHAT I MEAN SOON ENOUGH.

THINK OF IT AS ARMOR TO PROTECT YOU FROM MY PRIZED TREASURES.

…



...!

FIRST TIME SEEING THE MOUNTAINS OF THE GODS? THEY'RE CALLED THE *AFON NOAH.*

...

NOD
コクン…

THEY SAY THE ANCESTORS OF OUR RULER, THE YOJEH,

USED TO LIVE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THEM, IN THOSE DIVINE LANDS.

THEY ARE THE WALL THAT SEPARATES THE WORLD OF HUMANS FROM THE WORLD OF THE GODS.

"Afon Noah"...?

*IN THE MYTHS OF THE GODS, THE **AFON KAHLO**, THAT MOTHER USED TO TELL ME...*

I'VE HEARD ABOUT THEM BEFORE...

AND NOW, THE AFON NOAH ARE RIGHT HERE... BEFORE MY EYES...

Long, long ago,

in order to separate the worlds of gods and humans,

the fearsome gods erected tall, vast mountains on the land.

That's right.

Oooh ...

THE AFON NOAH HAVE EXISTED SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE WORLD.

THEY AREN'T GOING TO SUDDENLY DISAP-PEAR. YOU CAN GAZE UPON THEM ALL YOU LIKE LATER.

BUT FIRST, LET'S GO SEE MY BELOVED TREASURES!

IF YOUR EYES GET ANY WIDER, THEY MIGHT JUST FALL OUT OF YOUR HEAD!

Heh, heh, heh!

WOW...

BUZZZZ

WAIT...!

HUSH

DID I MISS A QUEEN CUP?!

OH...

OH NO!

THEY'RE... SWARM-ING!

BUZZ

BUZZ

BUZZ

EEEK!

!

ZZZZZZZ

GRAB

DON'T MAKE ANY SUDDEN MOVE-MENTS.

SLOWLY REACH DOWN AND PUT ON THE HAT, NOW.

DON'T YOU WORRY.

YOU JUST HAVE TO STAY STILL,

AND THEY WON'T ATTACK YOU.

!

...

Vzzzz

THEY... STOPPED?

...

IT'S ALL RIGHT NOW...

フゥ

PHEW

YOU CAN MOVE.

BUT GO SLOWLY.

Haaah...

Vzzz

...

THEY PROBABLY WON'T BE MOVING FOR HALF A DAY.

NOW THAT THEY'VE STOPPED ON A BRANCH LIKE THAT,

...DID THEY STOP THERE?

...

WHY...

PFFT!

DO THEY GET HONEY FROM THAT BRANCH?

THERE'S A QUEEN IN THAT BALL OF BEES?

THAT'S A SWARM BEING LED BY A QUEEN WHO HAS ABANDONED HER OLD HIVE.

NO, THEY DON'T.

SHE ENTRUSTS THE HIVE AND A PORTION OF THE COLONY TO A LARVA THAT WILL BECOME THE NEW QUEEN,

WHEN SHE FEELS THAT THE COLONY HAS GROWN TOO LARGE,

THEN TAKES THE REST WITH HER AND FLIES AWAY.

DID YOU SEE THE LAST BEE THAT FLEW BY? THE BIGGEST ONE IN THE SWARM?

THAT'S THE QUEEN BEE.

IN ORDER TO PREVENT THE QUEEN FROM FLYING TOO FAR AWAY, I NIP THE QUEEN'S WINGS JUST A SMIDGE.

IF SHE DOES, I'D BE LEFT TO STARVE.

Might seem a touch cruel, but it keeps her close by.

IS SHE GOING TO LEAVE ON A LONG JOURNEY?

THEN ...

HERE WE GO...

SHNFF

NOW THEN, I'LL NEED YOU TO HELP ME A LITTLE.

WE NEED TO PREPARE A NEW BEEHIVE FOR HER.

I'VE ONLY GOT THIS SPARE BOX LEFT.

THAT'S RIGHT...

OH!

CAN YOU HELP ME WITH CARRYING THE BLACK JUG THING OVER THERE?

I'LL CARRY THIS BOX OVER TO THE BEES.

THE SPRAYER?

DO YOU MEAN...

OH... THIS IS...

...

...SHE'D USE A SPRAYER THAT LOOKED A LOT LIKE THIS ONE.

WHENEVER MOTHER TREATED THE TODA'S INJURIES...

I'M SURPRISED YOU RECOGNIZED THAT AS A SPRAYER.

THAT'S RIGHT.

TMP

STAAARE (''

SHWOOF

SHWOOF

HERE, PASS ME THE SPRAYER.

THESE ARE CALLED COMB FRAMES.

THEY'RE LIKE HOUSES FOR THE BEES.

SHWOOF

YOU'RE USING SCENTS TO ATTRACT THE BEES TO THIS BOX, RIGHT?

OH...

I SEE...

SINCE BEES ARE ATTRACTED TO FRAGRANT FLOWERS.

IT DOES, DOESN'T IT?!

I HOPE THE BEES WILL THINK SO, TOO.

THAT SMELLS SO GOOD!

...

HUH...

THE WAY YOU SPEAK MAKES YOU SOUND A LOT OLDER.

HUH?

I'M TEN.

SAY, ELIN...

HOW OLD ARE YOU?

...

I'VE BEEN TOLD THAT BEFORE...

BLUSH

Elin, you talk like a grown-up.

BUT, TOO BAD...

YOUR GUESS IS WRONG.

ON THE CONTRARY, I'M QUITE IMPRESSED.

NOT IN A BAD WAY...! DON'T LET IT BOTHER YOU, ELIN.

...

CAN YOU HARBOR ANOTHER GUESS?

THERE'S A DIFFERENT REASON WHY I'M SPRAYING THIS LIQUID RIGHT NOW.

THE SUGAR WATER I'LL BE SPRAYING NEXT...

IS WHAT WILL ATTRACT THE SWARM TO THE BOX.

IS HE TRYING TO GET THE BEES DRUNK?

WHY... WOULD HE NEED SUCH A STRONG SCENT?

WELL,

I SUPPOSE IT'S NOT THAT EASY TO GUESS...

SHWOOF

SHWOOF

BEFORE THEY WENT IN, MOTHER AND THE OTHER STEWARDS WOULD SPREAD THE DEAD TODA'S MUCUS ON THE YOUNG ONES...

WHEN THE TODA DIED OF OLD AGE, YOUNG, NEW TODA WERE ADDED TO THE PONDS...

A STRONG SCENT...

IN THE BEES' HOME...

GASP

...

WHY...

WOULD YOU THINK THAT?

WAS THIS...

THE OLD HIVE OF ANOTHER COLONY OF BEES?

JOEUN...

YEAH?

WOW, I'M SHOCKED SPEECHLESS!!

YOU'RE EXACTLY RIGHT!

IT'S TO REMOVE THE OLD SMELL!

THAT'S THE RIGHT ANSWER.

...!!

...

I THOUGHT THAT MAYBE YOU'RE SPRAYING THE BOX IN ORDER TO REMOVE THE OLD BEES' SCENT...

YOU'VE GOT A LOVELY SMILE, ELIN.

OH...

I'VE FINALLY GOT A SMILE FROM YOU.

...I'M TRYING TO ERASE THE SMELL OF THEIR NATURAL ENEMIES.

IN THIS CASE...

SNIFF ? SNIFF ?

BUT THE BEES ARE JUST SO SENSITIVE TO SMELLS, YOU SEE...

I'VE ALREADY WASHED AND DRIED IT ONCE,

A WHILE AGO,

A *GOSU* GOT INTO THIS BOX. YOU KNOW, THOSE SMALL FROGS WITH A STRONG SCENT.

IT SCARED AWAY ALL THE BEES.

THAT'S WHY I WANTED TO TRY USING THE FRAGRANCE AS A WAY TO MASK THE GOSU'S SMELL.

THIS IS A LIQUID EXTRACTED FROM A *NAFALAN* FLOWER.

THE SCENT CAN CALM EXCITED BEES, TOO.

THE BEES JUST LOVE THAT FLOWER.

SHAKE TIL TIV SHAKE

DID YOUR FAMILY...

KEEP BEES, TOO?

I'M QUITE IMPRESSED YOU FIGURED THAT OUT!

...AND NOW I'VE CAST A CLOUD OVER HER SUNNY SMILE.

I FINALLY GOT A RADIANT SMILE ON HER FACE...

OH...

SHOOT.

...

YET, I COULDN'T HELP MY CURIOSITY...

...FROM ASKING HER QUESTIONS THAT I BEST KEEP TO MYSELF.

TO HER, FAMILY IS LIKE A DEEP WOUND THAT HAS YET TO HEAL.

I NEED TO PUT THE COMB FRAMES BACK INTO THE BOX. CAN YOU HELP ME?

...ALL RIGHT,

I'M FAR TOO IMPATIENT.

IT'S A TERRIBLE HABIT OF MINE.

...IF I WANT THIS CHILD TO BE AT EASE.

IT'S BEST IF I DON'T ASK ANY MORE QUESTIONS...

I'D WANT TO SEE THAT RADIANT SUN ON HER FACE AGAIN...

AFTER ALL.

Research assistance: Fujiwara Bee Farm, Iwate Prefecture.

To Be Continued in Volume 2

A HEAD-ON CHALLENGE!

The Beast Player is truly a blessed story. New life is constantly being breathed into it from talented creators. I'm sure many of you reading this have seen something of the anime adaptation, and may be appreciating the different ways in which a manga can express the story. And for those of you who love the original novel, you may also be enjoying the differences between the world as expressed on those pages and the world as it appears here.

"What do I want to express, and how do I want to express itw—for creators, these questions are, without exaggeration, a challenge to be faced head-on, for which one must put themselves on the line. When it comes to adapting a novel into a manga, one possible approach would have been to dissect the story and to reinterpret and retell it in one's own way.

But Takemoto-san chose instead to take a faithful approach, in an earnest, head-on challenge to my original work.

One cannot do that without a significant amount of resolve. To me, Elin's resolute gaze on the cover of the manga feels like a reflection of Takemoto-san's resolve as well. I'm quite taken with Takemoto-san's old-school spirit!

I hope all of you will join us in seeing this head-to-head contest through.

上橋菜穂子

Nahoko Uehashi

I'm certain everyone has had moments of anticipation and worry when their favorite novel gets adapted into a manga, anime, or other media of some kind. Especially when it comes to a novel, every reader has their own visual images of the characters and the world in their head. In being given the opportunity to adapt *The Beast Player* as a manga, I get to bring the images in my own head to life on the page...but there are tough days when even those seem impossibly out of reach. As a fan of the original novel, I was very nervous to work on it, and only recently have I felt that I've finally gotten the hang of it...? (I hope others feel the same?)

I've received some warm words from Uehashi-sensei that I am most grateful for...and yes, I'm not sure if this is a head-on challenge to her work, exactly, but I certainly am charging headlong forward, and am most thankful for all of you who have decided to join me on this ride.

Thank you.

To Nahoko Uehashi-sensei, my editors Nagaoka-sama and Sugiyama-sama, the Fujiwara Bee Farm for their research assistance, Eto-san, Osuka-san, Katayori-san, Chizu-san, Fumika-san, Matsuura-san, Moegi-san, Ryuya-san, all of my friends that supported me, my parents, and to all of you readers—thank you all!

The Beast Player 1

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